

Josie O'Gorman
and
The Meddlesome Major

Edith Van Dyne



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Josie O'Gorman
and the
Meddlesome Major



The package tore and disclosed a mass of filmy
lace.—Chapter VII

Josie O'Gorman and the Meddlesome Major

By
Edith Van Dyne

Author of
The Mary Louise Stories,
and Josie O'Gorman



Frontispiece by
Isabel Bush Mack

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Josie O'Gorman and the Meddlesome Major

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Josie and the Meddlesome Major

CHAPTER I

JOSIE BECOMES A SALES GIRL

“ Not much on looks! ”

“ Who? ”

“ That new girl the boss has just hired. Got no style to speak of. I reckon they’ll begin her at the notion counter. It don’t take much looks to hold down a job there. ”

“ Brains, perhaps! ” suggested a trim looking girl with twinkling grey eyes and wavy brown hair, noticeable in that it was not so elaborately coiffured as her companions’. “ My opinion is, Gertie Wheelan, that Mr. Burnett thinks more about brains than beauty where his business is concerned. ”

“ Don’t you fool yourself, Jane Morton. He may hire a plain one now and then because the

good lookers give out, but take it from me, there ain't a man livin' that don't fall for beauty. "

"Well, since you are already so pretty, Gertie, suppose you give us folks that run to brains a chance to doll up a bit. You've been standing in front of that looking glass for ten minutes and lunch hour's most up, " said a stylish little black-eyed girl who might have laid claim to beauty as well as wit.

"Stop shoving me, Min," begged Gertie. "Here, get in front of me. I can see over your head, you are such a little thing. "

"I'm young yet," snapped back Min. "By the time I am as old as you are I may grow some. "

Age was Gertie's tender point and Min's sally drew a delighted laugh from the girls assembled in the employees' room of the department store of Burnett & Burnett.

While they were talking and laughing and primping a young girl quietly entered the room, so quietly that she had removed her hat and wrap and put them away in the locker room before the group around the mirror was even aware of her presence. It was the new girl and Gertie Wheelen was right—she was not much on looks,

even less than that according to the standards of the employees of Burnett & Burnett. She was small, sandy haired, and her features, while not displeasing, were without distinction; eyes pale blue and nose more or less shapeless. Her mouth showed character and her teeth were white and even. Her complexion was good, being clear and healthy with a sprinkling of freckles over the formless nose.

Gertie was wrong about the lack of style. Josie O'Gorman, while not modish, had style; a style that was all her own. She managed by arrangement of hair and cut of gown to look enough like other persons to pass unnoticed in a crowd, and yet Josie's dress changed but little with the passing fashions and her intimate friends declared that the only alteration of hair dressing she ever indulged in was to show her ears or not show her ears according to the latest decree of fashion. Her dress was always immaculate and always the same—in the winter, blue serge with white collars and cuffs for the day, and white canton crepe trimmed with lace for evening; in the summer blue linen took the place of the blue serge and the canton crepe gave way to white linen or organdy. Her immaculate state was due to the

fact that she had many gowns of the same model and innumerable collars and cuffs which she always laundered herself.

“That’s her now,” said Gertie as she caught a glimpse of the new girl in the mirror over Min’s head.

“She!” corrected Jane Morton. “The last lecture on salesmanship laid especial stress on the importance of good English.”

Josie bowed politely and smiled pleasantly but impersonally at the girls.

“How do you do?” said Jane. “I hope you will like Burnett & Burnett’s. It is really a great place to work. I want to introduce you to the girls.”

“Glad to meet all of you—my name’s Josie O’Gorman.”

“Where are you to begin?” asked Gertie.

“Tapes, darning cotton and the like.”

“What did I tell you?” Gertie whispered audibly to Min.

“It is a good counter,” said Min. “It’s in the middle of the store where you can see everything that goes on. I tell you a lot is going on here lately—more ‘kleps’ have been busy. I’ve been working for Burnett & Burnett ever since I was

a kid and I know they have lost more in the last month than they have since I was a cash girl. Seems like things just vanish. It certainly made me hot when that box of point lace just disappeared off the face of the earth. I wish Mr. Burnett would take me away from the lace counter and put me over with the safety pins. Nobody ever bothers to steal safety pins from a shop but just borrows them from friends. ”

Josie laughed and decided she was going to like little Min and Jane Morton.

“Do you think somebody stole the whole box of point lace? ” Josie asked.

“ No I don’t think it — I *know* it. One minute it was there and the next minute it wasn’t there. I reported it the second that I missed it and Major Simpson, the detective, got busy right off but it was remnant day and the store was packed and jammed with bargain hunters and that lace was gone and gone for good. I sure did feel bad about it. I had to go up to the office and answer a million questions and before they got through with me I felt like I had swallowed the stuff and it was choking me. There was about five hundred dollars worth of lace in that box. ”

“ Well how’d you like to be me and have some

woman walk off with a whole bottle of perfume at ten dollars an ounce? ” asked Gertie. “ Old Burnett was sniffin’ around me so any body’d a thought I’d taken a bath in the stuff. I just howled and cried to beat the band. I made so much racket it took six floor walkers and the boss to pacify me and they finally sent me home in a taxi. I reckon the next time a thief gets busy at the toilet goods counter they won’t call on me to testify. ”

“ Your tears cost ten dollars an ounce, do they? ” laughed Josie.

“ Exactly! ”

“ I fawncy the thief is someone from the outside, ” drawled a girl who had hitherto been silent and who had been introduced to Josie as Miss Fauntleroy either because Jane Morton did not know her first name or did not care to use it. Miss Fauntleroy was a very striking looking young woman, tall, slender, and broad shouldered; a decided brunette with wonderfully arched brows and lashes long enough to marcel, at least so her co-workers at Burnett & Burnett’s declared. Her blue-black hair was done after the latest mode, with waves and puffs and ringlets galore and never a lock out of place even after the strenuous

ordeal of bargain day. Her voice was a deep contralto with a slightly foreign intonation, although she had divulged to Min that she was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, and intimated that she had cultivated the drawl and accent because she considered it elegant.

Of course Min had handed this information on to her best friends and it had become common property at the department store that Miss Fauntleroy was not near so mysterious as she would have one think. Her hands and feet were large but her shoes were stylishly cut and her nails showed much care and attention. She walked with a slow swinging gait and seemed never to be in a hurry, even when closing hour was approaching. Sse had proven herself an efficient saleswoman in the jewel and novelty department.

Josie O'Gorman's ostensible business at Burnett & Burnett's was the selling of tapes and darning cotton, and so ably did she play the part of shop girl that no one but her employers dreamed she was there for any other purpose. There was nothing in the girl's appearance to indicate that she was the cleverest detective of her age and sex in the United States.

Shop lifting had developed into a serious matter in the department store of Burnett & Burnett, so serious that they had found it necessary to call in outside help on their detective force. Up to this time the detective force had been more or less of a farce since it was what the younger member of the firm, Mr. Theodore Burnett, designated as an inherited failing, one handed down from father to son to grandsons. The "force" consisted of one old gentleman known as Major Simpson.

"I'm not saying poor old Simpson is not a good man, as good as they make them," Mr. Theodore Burnett said to Josie when she reported to the firm in regard to entering their employ.

"Good man but poor detective," put in the elder brother, Mr. Charles Burnett. "See here, Miss O'Gorman, we've got you over here from Dorfield because Captain Lonsdale has recommended you so highly. I fancy there are detectives right here in our own city of Wakely that could do the business for us but you understand we don't want poor old Simpson to know we are employing outside help. He is very touchy—"

"And very conceited!" interrupted Mr. Theodore.

“ Be that as it may, we don’t want to hurt his feelings as he has been with the firm from the beginning. My grandfather stated in his will that Major Simpson should have a job with us as long as he wanted it and after that was to be pensioned.”

“ But the old duck refuses to be pensioned although we offered to pay him more for not working than for working,” laughed Mr. Theodore.

“ I rather like that in him,” said Josie. “ But now to come down to what you want me to do. As I understand it I am to be employed by you secretly and you are to turn me loose, giving me carte blanche as to my methods.”

“ Ahem! ” hesitated Mr. Charles, who had his own idea about how everything connected with the department store should be run. “ N-n-ot exactly.”

“ Of course you are to work it your own way,” put in Theodore. “ My brother just means he’d take it as a favor if you report to us now and then.”

“ Naturally! Well then, in the first place perhaps I had better have another name to start with as somebody may know my true name. Not because of my own reputation as a detective—I have

none to speak of—but because of my father's. Perhaps you are aware of the fact that my father was one of the most able detectives in America, and that means the world, because we are up with the French and ahead of the Russians in the detective business.”

The Burnetts did not know it but they had the tact to pretend they did, so Josie's one tender point was spared a jab. Mary Smith was agreed upon as a good working name and the notion counter as a fair vantage point from which to view the comings and goings of possible shoplifters.

“I should like a list of the names and addresses of all your employees,” suggested Josie.

“Certainly, Miss O’Gorman,” agreed the brothers.

“Smith! Just forget my name is O’Gorman, please.”

“Oh, sure! Miss Smith!”

At this juncture there came a light knock on the door and without waiting for permission a dapper little old gentleman entered the private office of the president. Josie decided that the new comer was as pompous in the back as he was in the front and when he seated himself stiffly in a high backed

chair she came to the conclusion that he had achieved something which she had hitherto considered impossible—for a person to be as pompous sitting down as standing up. Evidently there was no doubt in the old gentleman's mind that he was a more important personage than either the president or vice-president of Burnett & Burnett's. As for the little sandy haired shop girl, who was no doubt being employed by the firm—she was of no importance whatsoever.

“ I wish to speak with you alone, Mr. Charles. Of course Mr. Theodore may remain if he so desires, but — ” he looked meaningly at Josie, “ others may retire. New girl, I presume.”

“ Yes — let me introduce you to Miss O'Gorman, Major Simpson,” said the senior member of the firm.

“ Smith,” hastily corrected the junior member. Major Simpson did not hear the correction and Josie was registered on the tablets of the old gentleman's memory as O'Gorman and O'Gorman she was forced to remain, since it was deemed wiser not to take the present incumbent of house detective into their confidence and being introduced by one name and employed by another would certainly have caused suspicion.

“ I am sorry Brother Charles made the break,” Theodore said as he accompanied Josie to the elevator, leaving his brother alone with Major Simpson.

“ Oh, that’s all right,” laughed Josie. “ I’m not much on aliases anyhow and really prefer working in my own name. Please let me have the list of employees and their addresses as soon as possible.”

CHAPTER II

THE NEW HOME ON MEADOW STREET

Wakely classed itself as a city, while Dorfield was content to be listed as a mere town that might someday grow up. In spite of its size, Wakely seemed to our young detective to be a very lonesome place on that first Sunday she was compelled to spend away from all her dear friends in Dorfield, where she had lived since her father's death. There were plenty of people in Wakely, too many people, in fact, making the housing problem a serious one. But nobody knew Josie and nobody cared to know her. Nobody paid the least attention to her at the beautiful old church where she had gone to worship in the morning; nobody spoke to her at the clean little restaurant where she had eaten her Sunday dinner; and now as she sat on a bench in the city park, nobody in all the surging throngs out for the usual Sunday stroll even so much as glanced her way.

Josie was not inclined to be lonesome. She was too interested in people and things to think very

much of her own aloneness, but there were times when in spite of herself she felt a crying need for a real home of her own; something more than the partitioned off rear end of a shop, which was where she had been living for some time before coming to Wakely. The place was called The Higgledy Piggledy Shop, conducted by Josie and her friends Elizabeth Wright and Irene Mac Farlane, and they had managed it to their profit and to the delectation of the citizens of Dorfield, who found in it a long felt want.

If the Higgledy Piggledies did not have what you wanted they would get it for you, and if they could not do what you wished done they would see to it that someone else did do it. For Josie the shop was in reality a side line of the detective business, but it was of great interest to her and she missed the gay chatter of the partners, the daily visits of her dear Mary Louise—young Mrs. Danny Dexter—and she sorely missed the kindly interest and advice of Captain Charlie Lonsdale, the Chief of Police of Dorfield. He it was who had so highly recommended Josie to Burnett & Burnett.

“I almost wish he hadn’t,” sighed Josie as she sat on the park bench in the wintry sunshine

and watched the people of Wakely swarm past. "I don't care much who steals the stupid old dry-goods. It's a dull job and I'd be glad to be out of it."

"Hello! There's somebody I know—but who on earth is it? Where have I seen that boy before? Certainly I don't remember ever having laid eyes on his companions, rare birds that they are!"

Many persons pride themselves on never forgetting a face, but Josie might have patted herself on the back for never forgetting a pair of shoulders, a set of head, a contour of cheek or chin. However, she was completely baffled by the youth who had passed her as she sat on the hard, cold bench. Our little detective was irritated that she could not remember where she had seen that turn of cheek and line of shoulder, so irritated that she decided the seat in the park was very uncomfortable and she would trail along behind the trio and find out something about them. Her curiosity was idle but was it not Sunday afternoon? Why not let curiosity be idle as well as persons?

The man and woman walking with the youth appeared too young to be the father and mother

of the boy and too old to be brother and sister, yet there was an intangible resemblance to both that led Josie to conclude they were his parents. The man was swarthy, black-eyed, and flashily dressed in a checked suit, gray spats and a brown derby. He walked with a slight swagger, twirling a slender cane in his lemon colored gloved hand.

The woman was small, inclined to be stout, and a great mop of henna colored hair elaborately dressed in waves and puffs defied oversight and invited scrutiny. She wore a handsome fur cloak and a purple velvet hat. Her cheeks and lips were tinted a bright coral and her nose was powdered like a marshmallow. In spite of the paint and powder there was something youthful and attractive about the woman. She walked with a light step and had a gay bird-like manner.

The younger man, or boy—he looked about eighteen, Josie decided—had an elegance that his companions lacked, although they would have been greatly astonished had they been told that the quiet unimportant little person, whom they had passed in the park and who later had passed them on the sidewalk, considered them anything but the last cry of elegance and fashion. Josie was able to get a good look at the trio at a crossing. Un-

doubtedly the boy was the son of the bizarre couple. He had his father's bold black eyes and his mother's delicate tilted nose and softly rounded cheek.

“Where—where have I seen him before?” Josie asked herself. “Never mind, I’ll remember some day. In the meantime I think I’ll find out where they live—not that it is any of my business—but one never can tell when information will come in handy in this business of detecting criminals. Anyhow I don’t trust those two, although I reckon the boy is all right. He looks too young to be anything else but all right and he looks honest, at least he looks honest in contrast to his father. My opinion is that the old one is in checks now but has been in stripes, or should have been. I wonder what they do. People, I’ll bet anything, and they do them brown while they are about it.”

Josie stopped to look in a window in order to let the trio get ahead of her and then nonchalantly followed them at a safe distance. They talked animatedly and their gestures were decidedly foreign-like in their swift and jerky repetition. It was impossible for Josie to catch what they were saying without seeming too interested

in them, but it was easy to see that both man and woman were endeavoring to pacify the youth and persuade him to do something to which he was opposed. Once he stopped short on the sidewalk and Josie came within earshot as the boy said in a tone of suppressed violence:

“ I tell you I’m sick of the whole game. I’m going to quit! ”

“ Oh, Roy, darling, not just now,” purred the woman, and Josie noted that the R in Roy and darling was softly rolled, giving a slightly foreign accent. “ Not now when— ” but the woman whispered the rest and the listener could not hear what was the big reason for not quitting just yet, nor could she gather what the game was that Roy wanted to quit.

The man said nothing, merely stood gnawing his moustache in a manner highly melodramatic and cut the air viciously with his slender cane. Josie loitered after them, wondering what part of the city they lived in, what they did for a living, and in the back of her brain was always the question: “ Where have I seen the boy before? ”

Josie was stopping for the time being at a hotel, though she realized it would never do for it to be known that a shop girl was living so ex-

travagantly. Early in life Josie O'Gorman had learned from her illustrious father that in the detective business no detail was too small to be overlooked. If one was supposed to be a shop girl then one must live, eat, dress, act and talk like a shop girl. After three days at Burnett & Burnett's Josie had come to the conclusion that shop girls were like any other wage earning girls, some silly, some clever; some educated, some ignorant; some inclined to put all their earnings on their backs, some saving up for a rainy day; but none of them were able to live in hotels. So, to play the part, she must bestir herself and find other quarters. The firm was paying her handsomely for her time and she could well afford to keep her comfortable room and bath. She was tempted to do it and give a false address if any of the girls should ask her where she lived but she remembered one of her father's favorite sayings:

“ Oh, what a tangled web we weave

When first we practice to deceive.”

This old saying had decided the matter for her and on that Sunday afternoon she had armed herself with clippings from the “ Boarders Wanted ” column in the morning paper and was determined

to go the rounds and settle herself as soon as possible. The trio she was following turned the corner. Josie turned after them. Glancing at the street sign she read that she was on Meadow Street. Several of the ads were on Meadow Street. She ran quickly through them.

The man, woman and youth went in at No. 11. It was a shabby, drab looking apartment house. Yes, there was a room for rent in that very house—"Widow and daughter wish to rent room to young business woman. 11 East Meadow, apartment 4."

Josie had liked the ad from the beginning. "They don't flaunt their own refinement in their ad and they say business woman instead of business lady. They delicately inform the public that there is no brute of a husband around. On the whole I believe I'll rent a room at 11 East Meadow. I can keep my eye on those flashy folk if I do. I suppose it's none of my business—but one never can tell."

Josie noticed that the interesting trio went in the house without ringing one of the bells displayed in the lobby. "That means they either live here or are intimate with some one who does," was her conclusion.

Apartment 4 proved to be one of the back ones on the lower floor. The family who had so interested Josie had entered the one marked 3. After ringing the bell of No. 4, Josie had peered into the dark hall and had plainly seen the fur coat of the henna haired woman disappear through the door after the man in the checked suit had opened it with a latch key.

“That settles me,” thought Josie. “I’ll take this room if the widow and her daughter turn out to be most undesirable landladies in Wakely.”

Fortunately they turned out to be pleasant folk who had seen better days, to which the refinement and taste in the furnishings of their living room gave mute evidence. The tiny bedroom advertised for rent suited Josie perfectly; suited also the part she must play as a new shop girl at Burnett & Burnett’s with but little money to spend on sleeping quarters.

Mrs. Leslie did hemstitching and fine embroidery to eke out the salary her daughter made as a stenographer. The home was neat, and while Josie’s room had only one very small window, it did not open on a court but had a view of a small back yard which Mrs. Leslie informed her would later prove a great pleasure to them all.

“It is really quite sweet, and the janitor says that in the spring we may plant all the seeds there we want to. Mary and I will be much happier if we have a place where we can dig. We never quite get over longing for the country.”

Everything being satisfactory, Josie moved in that very evening, the question of references being waived because Mrs. Leslie had a feeling when she looked in Josie's honest face that she was going to like her; and since one of the trusted employees of Burnett & Burnett's came from her county that fact was enough to guarantee the goodness of any one of his fellow employees.

“We are sorry not to give you your meals,” said Mrs. Leslie, “but Mary and I live so simply.”

“You couldn't live too simply for me,” declared Josie, “but I wouldn't be any trouble to you for worlds. I can easily get my meals at one of the many restaurants near here.”

“Oh Mother, couldn't we?” asked Mary. “Anyhow just breakfast —” and Mrs. Leslie decided they could manage breakfast and dinner too. So Josie was installed as a lodger and boarder and soon the lonesome feeling departed as she began to think that perhaps Wakely was not such a dismally lonely city after all.

The Leslie's were a gentle, pleasant, kindly pair, and Josie was sorely tempted to tell them all about herself; how she happened to be in Wakely and what her real profession was. But she remembered in time what her father used to say, holding up a forefinger in impressive fashion:

“ You know and I know and that makes eleven.”

So Josie held her tongue. She was such an “ eloquent listener ” that persons were inclined to tell her all about themselves and to forget to ask for the story of her life. The Leslie's were like most others and found themselves chatting away to their new lodger with little or no restraint. She found out they were strangers in Wakely, having lived there only two months, knowing very few people in the town and none of the fellow tenants.

“ We don't even know the people who live right next to us,” said Mary. “ Mother says she is glad we don't but I must confess I'd rather like to know the boy. He is so handsome and kind of sad looking. I can't say much for the sister, though. She is handsome enough but at times a little coarse and rough. The boy is at home only on Saturday afternoons and Sunday. I have an idea he and his sister are not on very good terms.

I have never yet seen them go anywhere together. I can't see why, because if I had a brother I'd be tagging on after him all the time."

"Especially if he were such a good looking brother as you say this young man next door is," laughed Josie.

CHAPTER III

THE NEIGHBORS IN APARTMENT 3

Josie reported for work bright and early Monday morning, so early that she was able to have a private interview with Mr. Theodore Burnett before the business of selling notions was booked to begin. He had the list of employees and their addresses all neatly typed, also in what department of the store each one worked.

“I may not be able to keep up the farce of selling notions for very long,” Josie explained to him. “You may have to pretend to suspend me or something so I can have time to be a detective but I’d like to hang on there for a few days so I can get the run of things.”

“Suit yourself, young lady! We are in your hands. By the way, old Major Simpson was rather curious about you. I do not understand why he wanted to know so much about you.”

“I don’t either. Perhaps he met my father in days gone by.”

Whatever the reason, Josie could but notice

that the pompous old detective spent a great deal of time hanging around the notion counter. He seemed to be vastly interested in what she was doing and was constantly bumping into her whenever she left her department. She even fancied he dogged her footsteps when she went out to lunch, and was sure that he followed her all the way home.

“It can’t be my beauty that is attracting him, because there is no such thing; and it can’t be my wit, for he has not heard me say a word. It must be that I look like my father and somewhere in his profession as detective he met my father.”

It was a well known fact that Detective O’Gorman had been one of the homeliest men in the service, but such was his little daughter’s admiration for him that she never could get a compliment that pleased her so much as for someone to say she resembled him in the slightest degree.

“Old Major Simpson would have been a joke to him, but there may be some intelligence in the old fellow after all. There certainly is if he admired my father.” So thought Josie as she walked through the streets of Wakely, conscious that a bombastic old gentleman was dogging her footsteps. In her work of selling notions she was

sure that never a paper of pins was sold by her without the house detective's knowledge. At first it irritated her, but in the end she found it an amusing game to elude his watchful eye.

By carefully studying the list of employees she soon was able to fit name to face over the whole store and place each person in his or her proper department. Then came the job of finding the address of each employee.

“It seems to me important to know if any of them are living beyond their means,” she explained to Mr. Theodore when he asked her why she went to work in such a systematic manner. “When persons begin to do that, then it's time to look out. They have a motive for getting-rich-quick, and sometimes when there is a motive the action follows fast.”

Poor old Major Simpson had a hard time keeping up with Josie. Every evening after the store was closed the girl made it her business to check off a certain number of fellow workers, quietly rounding up their homes, sometimes walking with them under a pretext of having business in their neighborhoods, sometimes merely following them. The panting and puffing detective lost the scent continually, and then Josie felt sorry for him and

made it easier for him the next time. Gradually she made friends with the employees, careful always to be the listener and for that reason universally popular. So completely did she efface herself when she happened to make one of a crowd that the girls would actually forget her presence.

Miss Fauntleroy, the tall handsome girl at the jewel counter, was one person to whom Josie found it difficult to make up. She had a cold manner and attended strictly to business. The address given on the list was a suburban one, 10 Linden Row, Linden Heights, and Josie was forced to put off looking into her surroundings until the winter weather abated somewhat in its ferocity.

“Not that I mind the weather,” she said to herself, “but it would be too bad to take the old Major out where there are no paved streets while snow is up to one’s knees. He might catch his death.”

There was a let up in the shop lifting, no trouble having occurred since Josie entered the employ of Burnett & Burnett. She had been with them two weeks and except for the fact that she proved to be an able saleswoman of notions, she had accomplished nothing.

“You had better dismiss me and let me go

back home," she said to Mr. Theodore. "You certainly have no need of me here, and the Hig-gledy Piggledy Shop is missing me sorely."

"Not at all!" declared the junior member of the firm. "We have plenty of need of you. It may be that there is no shop lifting because the thief is afraid of you."

"But how could he know I was here?"

"Perhaps others know of the fame of your father as well as old Simpson."

"Perhaps—but after all I am not supposed to be so much a watchdog as a blood hound. If detectives were simply preventives they would lose all their cunning and skill from disuse. I am sure you could find a cheaper watchdog than I am."

"Well, we are not kicking about the price so why need you?"

Josie had had many interviews with the members of the firm and felt they were her friends and respected her. She especially liked Mr. Theodore, who seemed somewhat more progressive than his brother, but both of them were kindly and courteous. Mr. Theodore, who was an old bachelor, had invited Josie to dine with his family; insisting that his mother and sisters would come and call on her and that they would be delighted

to make her acquaintance, but Josie had firmly refused.

“Not while I am selling notions,” she had laughed. “It would leak out in the store somehow and then someone would suspect immediately that I was not what I seem to be. Major Simpson is already worried about me and my job. I’ll wager he is standing outside of this door right now and his moustache and goatee are both bristling with curiosity concerning what the business is that brings me to your private office before opening hours. He would have his ear at the key hole if he dared and if his sense of dignity didn’t forbid. Why don’t you take him into your confidence? It doesn’t seem quite fair somehow.”

“Fair enough! If he wasn’t so conceited we might have you work with him but he is so cock sure of his own ability. I give you my word, Miss O’Gorman, he has never yet landed a shoplifter. Sometimes they have been caught by clerks or floor walkers, but old Simpson can’t see beyond his own embonpoint. Of course if you want his help—”

“Heavens, no!” laughed Josie, “but I should like to know what he knows about me and my being here, and why he doesn’t come out and say so if

he does know who I am. Is he at all peeved with you and Mr. Burnett, your brother? ”

“ Not at all. In fact, he seems especially delighted with us as well as himself. I can always tell when he is pleased by the way he smiles on me and strokes his goatee.”

Three weeks had passed and Josie felt she was not earning her salt. Carefully she watched the lower floor of the store from the vantage ground of the notion counter. Two bargain Fridays had come and gone and as far as Burnett & Burnett could tell not one single person had left their emporium without either paying or promising to pay for the goods carried off.

The evenings with the Leslies were quiet and peaceful. The neighbors at No. 3 left early and returned late. Josie occasionally caught a glimpse of the man and his wife but she had not seen the girl. The youth, she had encountered twice in the street and still his appearance puzzled her. She was more certain than ever that she had seen him before, but where?

“ I believe they are kind and charitable, anyhow,” said Mary. “ I met a terrible looking old beggar in the hall coming from their apartment and I am sure they had given him

something because the lady spoke to him in such a gentle tone and he answered her gently and — ”

“ What did they say? ” asked Josie.

“ I couldn’t make out, but it sounded kind of foreign. That made me think maybe the woman has found out there is someone of her nationality here in Wakely and she is kind to him because he is from her own country.” Mary was the type that always made the best of everything and everybody.

“ Well, for my part, I think it is a great mistake to encourage tramps and beggars,” said Mrs. Leslie. “ Now in the country we never could do it. If we even so much as fed one tramp we had a swarm of them coming to us for years. My husband once gave one an old suit of clothes and some shoes and after I had fed him Mr. Leslie told him he could spend the night in the barn because it was coming up to snow. After that a week never passed that some disreputable old bum didn’t come whining to my back door. It kept up until we had the road gate painted, posts and all, and then they let up on us and we began to think that the first one had put the tramp’s mark on our gate and all the others read it and knew we were kind hearted. Of course the paint destroyed the mark.”

“What a wonderful mark to have on your gate!” exclaimed Mary. “I wish I knew what it was and could put one on our door.”

“Perhaps one is there,” suggested Josie, “and I saw it and ventured in.”

“I don’t want any real tramps around here,” insisted Mrs. Leslie. “You, Josie, are less like a tramp than any one I ever saw. I felt safe with you from the moment you entered the door and I never have felt safe with any tramp. I don’t like to think that tramps might be coming in and out of this house and if I ever see or hear of another one being in the hall I am going to complain to the landlord.”

“Oh, Mother, please don’t! What would our neighbors think of us?”

“It makes mighty little difference what they think. People who don’t speak our language and have tramps calling on them have no business thinking.”

Josie laughed. Mrs. Leslie’s feeling in regard to tramps and foreigners was a common one with persons born and raised in the country. They encouraged neither tramping nor immigration.

“We have two beggars at Burnett & Burnett’s,” said Josie, “one at the front entrance

and one at the back. It is against my principles to give to street beggars but I have a hard time getting by those two. The Associated Charities are consantly asking the public not to encourage beggars but send them to the A. C. so that they can look into their cases. I am sure they are right, and good citizens should uphold them; but beggars such as we have at our front and back entrances seem to be able to appeal against reason and I am sure they reap a substantial harvest. When charitable ladies get up tag days for their pet concerns they should man the stations with just such beggars instead of attractive young girls."

"I thought begging on the street was against the city ordinances," said Mrs. Leslie.

"Oh, they get around all laws by pretending to sell something. This beggar man at the front door sells lead pencils and the woman at the back goes through the motions of selling newspapers. She never has the last edition and always whines if anyone wants change. She is a husky looking person and I believe is well fed, in spite of the pretext she makes of dining off crusts."

"Poor thing!" exclaimed Mary. "I'm sorry for her even though she may be a fraud."

“Of course there is no easy way of making an honest living,” laughed Josie, “whether it be pounding a typewriter or — selling notions.” It was on the tip of Josie’s tongue to say lying in wait for shoplifters. “Begging is not such a bad way to spend your time if you are interested in human nature. Of course it must be rather hard on the man at the front entrance because he wears a patch over one eye and part of his game is to keep the other one half shut. That means he can’t see all that is going on, but who knows? He may be able to see more with half an eye than many persons can with two wide open ones.”

“The beggar I saw in the hall had a patch over his eye. I noticed it particularly, and felt sorrier than ever for him. I’d have given him something if he hadn’t hurried away so fast when I came in.”

“A great many beggars seem to be minus one eye,” said Josie. “I remember reading once of a great French detective who captured a notorious criminal, who was operating as a blind beggar with a patch over his eye, because the *pseudo*-beggar inadvertently changed blind eyes. The detective had passed him

many times on the Pont Neuf in Paris, where the beggar had stood for weeks and weeks whining a pitiful tale. Now this detective, like all good ones, let nothing escape him, and he had noticed that the blind beggar wore a patch over his right eye. One morning the patch had moved to the left one. That set Mr. Detective to thinking and he watched the man. When darkness came the man stopped begging for the day, hobbled from the bridge into a nearby crooked street and there he straightened up, took off the tell tale patch and walked briskly along the side walk. Then it was an easy matter to track him to his luxurious lair. Begging was merely a side line, as burglary on a large scale was his real profession. He was attempting to conceal his identity under the cloak of a mendicant.

“ I still say, poor fellow,” said Mary.

“ And I say,” said Mrs. Leslie shrewdly, “ that if I were a detective I’d wonder what on earth made you, Josie, go into being a shop girl. I begin to think it is nothing but a side line with you.”

Josie, being completely off her guard, hardly knew how to answer Mrs. Leslie. She did not deem it wise to take mother and daughter into

her confidence concerning her true business in Wakely. She blushed and stammered like a veritable novice at the game of concealment and falteringly assured Mrs. Leslie that she had been forced into selling notions because of reverses in her family fortunes.

“To be sure the wages are not so very high,” she continued, “but Burnett & Burnett’s is a pleasant place in which to work. Then, too, it is so nice to be here with you and Mary that I don’t mind being in a store all day.”

Mrs. Leslie expressed herself as satisfied concerning her lodger’s profession but she afterwards said to her daughter: “She has a kind of high-brow way with her at times that makes me doubt her being just a poor girl; and her clothes, while they are simple, are made of such good material. You can’t fool me on dry goods. I tell you, Mary, Josie’s dresses are made out of stuff that cost five dollars a yard.”

CHAPTER IV

JOSIE'S LITTLE BLACK BOOK

“ Now I’ve talked too much! ” Josie took herself to task after retiring to her room. “ Mrs. Leslie has some kind of suspicion concerning me and it is all my own fault. I wonder what my father would have done under the circumstances.”

She took from her top drawer a little leather book; her most valued possession and without which she never traveled. It was a chunky little book, evidently home made. The pages were covered with neatly written lines which, to the uninitiated, looked like so much Greek script. It was in reality a cryptic shorthand invented by Detective O’Gorman and known only to him and his daughter and one other—a certain criminal, Felix Markham. How he came to know this family code is another story altogether. At any rate, in the United States Josie was the only person who could make heads or tails of this writing, as her dear father had gone to that far country

where detectives find no work to do, and Markham had fled to China after having executed a daring escape from the penitentiary.

In this little book the detective had inscribed many homely sayings, some original but most of them borrowed from *Poor Richard's Almanac*, the Proverbs of Solomon and other like sources. Josie often amused her friends by quoting these bits of wisdom as though her dear father had been responsible for all of them. Also in this book was written much that was interesting and valuable concerning criminals with whom O'Gorman had come in contact; descriptions of their appearance, habits and peculiarities, as well as the lists of their aliases and professions engaged in as blinds.

All of this was interesting reading and Josie never tired of conning over the difficult script. Reading between the lines she caught hints of successes which the noted criminologist was too modest even to put in his diary, although it was written in a shorthand known only to himself and his daughter and was meant for no other eyes.

On this night it was not her father's successes that interested Josie, but his failures. The last twenty pages of the little book were filled with

his failures and analyses of why he had failed, also admonitions to his daughter as to what she should avoid in the way of pitfalls for a detective.

“ When you find you have aroused suspicion in the mind of someone as to your real business which it is perhaps expedient to conceal, do not be too quick to allay those suspicions as the person concerned will no doubt be on the lookout to trap you. If, in the course of time, you quietly do or say again the same thing that first aroused the suspicion in the mind of the person and then, being on your guard, make some casual explanation, it will be more convincing than changing too quickly and appearing for that reason rather unnatural. For instance, if, the better to catch a criminal, you have been taking the part of a lowly person, say a dishwasher in a restaurant, and inadvertently you show yourself to be educated — do not immediately revert to slang and double negatives to throw the person to whom you have revealed your culture off the scent, but rather show other bits of learning and then have a plausible story ready to account for a dishwasher knowing something beyond hot suds and drainers and tea towels.”

“ There I am! ” exclaimed Josie. “ I am not

sure just what it was that started Mrs. Leslie but I think it was the free and easy gabble about Paris bridges and luxurious lairs. Now I must bring up the subject again and talk some more about the same thing and then give her some kind of song and dance that will sound plausible enough to throw her off the scent. Then I'll jump back to the subject of bone buttons and linen tape and maybe haul in something about a handsome floor walker at Burnett & Burnett's."

Satisfied with the plan, Josie devoutly closed her little book and went peacefully to sleep, wickedly hoping that somebody would do a little shop-lifting the next day to keep her from dying of ennui.

Breakfast was hurried and she had little time to talk to Mrs. Leslie. One could not be very tactful nor use much finesse with a mouth full of hot oatmeal porridge. To talk about the crime wave in Paris so early in the morning would be ridiculous. It must keep until evening. Perhaps she was mistaken about Mrs. Leslie having any suspicion of her. Mary was as gentle and lovely as ever and her mother was certainly most considerate and cordial in her insistence that Josie should have another cup of coffee. After all, she

had nothing to conceal—that is, nothing that would be to her discredit. It was only that she deemed it wiser to keep to herself her real business in Wakely. Of course if Mrs. Leslie became too suspicious it would be a simple matter to tell her the whole truth.

That morning the girls started to town a little earlier than was their custom. It was Saturday and a half holiday. Mary had some extra typing on hand she was anxious to finish and Josie wanted to interview Mr. Theodore Burnett before the store opened. As they stepped into the public hall of the apartment house they ran into the same beggar of whom Mary had spoken the evening before. The hall was unlighted except for a pale streak of sun that tried to find its way through the dingy glass of the street door but Josie did not need much light to recognize the man as the beggar who sat at the main door of Burnett & Burnett's. The man began a pleading beggar's whine and held out his hand to the girls. Unfortunately for him Mrs. Leslie opened her door at that moment to call a last good bye to her daughter and to remind her of some promised errand. The sight of the beggar angered her and she spoke sharply to him:

“ Begone sir! ” she cried. “ It is against all rules of the house to have beggars in the hall.”

“ Excuse! Excuse! ” and the man bowed humbly, shuffling off with bent back and palsied head. As he passed the irate lady, Josie caught the flash of resentment that glowed in his one eye.

“ Oh, Mother, the poor fellow! ” said Mary. “ I feel so sorry for him and you hurt his feelings terribly.”

“ He'd no business in the hall. Perhaps I was a bit hasty. Here, run after him, Mary, and give him this penny. But tell him he mustn't come back here.”

Mary added a small sum to her mother's penny and hastening after the man pressed it in his hand. Josie, who was close behind, again caught an expression on the man's face — a leer of admiration for the pretty young girl with her fresh rosy face and kind blue eyes.

A view of him in broad daylight convinced Josie that he really was the beggar who had the desirable stand at the front entrance to Burnett & Burnett's and also the realization came to her that she had seen the man before and that it was not as a mendicant.

For the second time since Josie came to Wakely

she puzzled her brains over where before she had seen or known a man, this time an old one. She was still in doubt as to the identity of the young man who evidently lived in the apartment next the Leslie's, and now a palsied old beggar was adding to her perplexity.

"I'll keep an eye on him during the morning and perhaps I'll remember," she promised herself.

It was a busy morning but between sales Josie managed to get an occasional glimpse of the one eyed beggar at the gate. He, too, was doing a thriving business. Josie wondered if the woman at the rear entrance was playing in such good luck as her rival in the front. Once during the morning she had occasion to pass by the back door and could look out at the female newsie. Straggling iron gray hair was blown by the wintry breezes across a round, plump face which Nature had doubtless intended to be wreathed in perpetual smiles and which seemed with difficulty to assume an expression of misery and woe. Her comfortable, well rounded body was arrayed in pitiful rags. Josie determined to study her more closely and accordingly when the store closed she made her exit by the rear door.

“ Pa - a - perrr! Pa - a - perrr! ” quavered the woman in a tone that spoke of utter misery and dejection.

A genial gentleman stopped to buy one.

“ Is it the last edition? ” he asked.

“ Ye-e-ss sirr! ” she wined, “ the very latest.”

He handed her a quarter of a dollar.

“ I haven't an-y ch-aa-nge, sirr.”

“ No change? Well then keep it! ” he exclaimed with a note of irritation in his voice.

Saturday was a short day for the employees of Burnett & Burnett's and Josie determined to use the afternoon in looking up some more residences of her fellow workers. The day was pleasant, with a hint of premature spring in the air; an excellent day for checking up on some of the suburban addresses.

“ I wonder if Major Simpson will follow me. Anyhow, I have chosen a balmy afternoon for his jaunt if he decides to take it,” she laughed. “ I have a great mind to give him the slip.”

By the simple expedient of going up one elevator and down another Josie eluded the old detective, who was evidently on the lookout for her. She then quickly made her way to the rear exit and was out on the street before the old gentle-

man realized that the young person in whom he was taking such an unaccountable interest had flown the coop.

“ Ding bust it! ” he remarked eloquently, “ I’ll come up with her yet.”

Miss Fauntleroy was immediately in front of Josie, moving with her accustomed slow grace. The girl was well proportioned and Josie had not realized before how very tall she was. Being of rather a diminutive stature herself, she seemed almost a dwarf by the side of the stately young woman.

“ Pa-a-perr, pa-a-perr,” quavered the old woman in an irritating whine.

Miss Fauntleroy stopped and holding out a dime asked for a newspaper. Her voice was singularly hard and cold but the old beggar seemed rather amused as she answered:

“ Yes, my prr-r-ty! Here’s your Jou-r-rnal.”

“ Give me my change,” demanded the girl haughtily.

“ Change? Sur-r-ely you know an old woman like me can’t make change.”

“ Well you’ll make it for me or give me back my dime,” said the girl angrily, her voice breaking hoarsely. She snatched the money from the

old woman's hand and rudely twisting and rumpling the paper so that it would be difficult to sell to another customer, she threw it into the basket at the beggar's feet and then walked proudly away.

While Josie held no brief for beggars of any sort, neither those who begged outright nor those who begged under the guise of selling back number papers or pencils made of scrap lead, still her heart was kind and it tried her sorely to witness the rudeness and direct unkindness of the inconsiderate Miss Fauntleroy.

“Here! I'll take that rumpled paper,” she said gently, handing the correct change to the old woman. “I can smooth it out and read it on the trolley.” She stooped swiftly and picked up the twisted *Wakely Journal*.

“No, no, lady! I'll give you a nice clean perr,” insisted the newsie, reaching eagerly for the one that Miss Fauntleroy had thrown so disdainfully in her basket. But Josie clutched it tightly and was soon lost in the crowd, while the old woman sat dazed and disconsolate, forgetting to cry her wares as the employees trooped forth from *Burnett & Burnett's*.

CHAPTER V

THE MAJOR TAKES UP A TRAIL

Josie jammed the rumpled paper in the big patch pocket of her sport coat and thought no more about it. She boarded the interurban trolley which passed through Linden Heights, wondering if Miss Fauntleroy could be on it and doubtful whether it were better for her to get off at Linden Row with that haughty and evidently bad tempered young woman or to ride on for several blocks. The crowded car thinned out as they approached the suburbs. Josie was soon able to make sure that the girl was not on board.

“Let me off at Linden Row, please,” she asked the conductor.

“Sure, miss, an’ the sign was put up only yesterday so I know where it is. The streets out here ain’t marked reg’lar.”

Linden Heights presented the appearance of much suburban property aspiring to become urban; streets and avenues named, sidewalks laid out, curbing placed, everything ready to make a

thriving, prosperous, homelike neighborhood — everything but the homes and the neighbors. The houses were few and far between and Linden Row, though boasting a brand new name on a brand new corner and a brand new row of spindling linden trees, had not a house to its name. Josie walked north until the sad young street lost itself in a corn field; then she retraced her steps, crossed the car tracks and walked south until a swamp interrupted her progress, and still no habitation. Bullfrogs were singing their spring song in the swamp so Josie felt repaid for her long ride on the trolley.

“It means spring is almost here,” she said to herself, “is here, in fact. It’s a surer sign than thunder and lightning; surer than the robin’s whistle or trailing arbutus blossoms. How my dear father did love to hear the bullfrogs!”

So far as Josie could ascertain Linden Heights was nothing more than a real estate map. At any rate there was not a single house in the place with the exception of an old farm house, the mansion of the original owners of the tract, and when Josie knocked on the door with a trumped up plea that she was hunting a place to board, she was met without much encouragement by an old

man with a tousled beard and mane who gave her to understand that he couldn't abide women and wouldn't let one of them stay on his place for five minutes. At least she had found out what she wanted to know: Miss Fauntleroy did not live there.

"Very puzzling!" she mused. "Why did she give a fictitious address to her employers? The first interesting thing that has happened since I came to this town. I hope it will lead to something. Anyhow I'll watch this strange girl and find out something more about her. She certainly was very rude to the old beggar."

On the way back to the city Josie decided to read the paper she had bought from the old woman, but at that moment she became engrossed in the conversation of some of her fellow passengers and the *Wakely Journal* remained in the patch pocket of her sport coat.

"The only thing I regret about my fruitless trip to Linden Heights is that I didn't have the company of old Major Simpson," Josie amused herself by thinking. "I shouldn't call it fruitless, however, as it may lead to something. Anyhow, I'm wondering what the dear Major did in my absence."

Had Josie realized what the dear Major was doing in her absence she would not have been quite so nonchalant in her idle surmises. No doubt his actions would have amused her but certainly they would have irritated her as well.

In the first place, Josie had hardly made her escape by the rear entrance of the department store when Min, whose surname was Tracy, gave a hurry call from the lace counter that in putting up her goods she had discovered the loss of many yards of the filmiest and finest lace in stock. The counter next to her reported missing a very expensive imported gold mesh bag. A hue and cry was raised by the excited Major Simpson and after much pompous blustering he had rushed to the office of the chief executives where he not only reported the theft but demanded Josie O'Gorman's address.

“So you have a suspicion of who she is then, this Miss O'Gorman?” asked Mr. Theodore Burnett.

“Yes, I've had my eye on her for days. I have not been in the detective business for all of these years without being able to distinguish a girl of her type from a simple saleslady of buttons and what not.”

“ Well, you are pretty clever, Major. I hope you two can get together. You say she has gone for the day? Do you think she can clear up this shop lifting mystery? ”

“ Of course she can if anyone can. Give me her address and maybe I can overtake her.”

“ Eleven, East Meadow, Apartment 4, is her address. It is remarkable that a girl as young as she is can be so successful. She is very clever I think.”

“ Yes — altogether too clever! ” muttered Major Simpson. “ But she will find there are others,” he intimated darkly.

“ Yes, yes! ” said Mr. Burnett uneasily, “ but for goodness sake don’t be short with her. I am sure that through her we may be able to track down the whole gang of shoplifters.”

“ Trust me, my dear Theodore, trust me! ” said the Major, patting his white vest comfortably. “ I will use all the finesse that my long service in this establishment has fostered. You need never fear that Silvester Simpson will be anything but a diplomat.”

“ Oh sure! Sure! ” added Mr. Burnett quickly. “ I’ll leave it to you but I beg of you that you communicate with Miss O’Gorman at once.”

“Immediately!” and the Major strutted from the office.

“Eleven, East Meadow,” he mused. “That is the right address. I have followed her home often enough to know, but I asked Theodore just to see if the person had the temerity to give her real address.” And the old gentleman, not trusting his short legs to carry him to number eleven fast enough, hastily called a taxi.

When Major Simpson rang a bell he did not simply touch a button, he pressed it, and that with no light finger but with the end of his walking stick, leaning heavily against it until the bell was answered or broken.

Mrs. Leslie answered it quickly and somewhat indignantly. She had a sponge cake in the oven and the noise of the bell was enough to make it fall.

“What is it, sir?” but her tone of asperity quickly changed when she saw who was responsible for the clamor. “Well if it isn’t Major Sylvester Simpson. Sakes alive, Major Simpson, how did you find me out? I’ve been telling myself every day for two months that I ought to let you know I was in Wakely because of our families being kind of hereditary friends, but

Mary and I are living in such a small way, and — ”

Major Simpson — Major by courtesy only — made up in gallantry what he lacked in finesse. Not for worlds would he inform Mrs. Leslie that he was not looking her up at all and was quite as astonished to see her as she was to see him. He remembered her quite well as little Polly Bainbridge, whose grandfather's farm was just across the creek from the Simpson's farm. She had been a little girl when he was a grown man spending his yearly holidays in the country. He remembered faintly once having made her a present of a pink parasol on one of those visits. She was a very small girl and he was even then a floor walker at Burnett & Burnett's. Perhaps that was how he happened to know the appeal a pink parasol has for a little girl.

Now that he had found her he must come in and see her. Of course it could not be that the person of whom he was really in search could possibly be living with Polly Bainbridge — now Mrs. Leslie — who came from his county and was of honest and respectable parentage as had also been her husband, people of good blood and reputation.

The Leslie's living room was homelike, pleasant, and spotlessly clean, but with a certain feminine disorder in the way of a work basket open on the table, a scarf thrown over the back of a chair, a bit of embroidery on the sofa. This made an irresistible appeal to Major Simpson who, though a bachelor, was a great admirer of "the ladies" unless they happened to be "sales-ladies." These he always regarded with suspicion as being either incipient shoplifters or, worse than that even, designing females who aspired to become Mrs. Simpson.

He settled himself in a comfortable overstuffed chair, conveniently low enough to allow him to cross his plump legs, and sniffed the pleasing odors emanating from the tiny kitchen.

"You must excuse me a minute," blushed Mrs. Leslie, "but I have a cake in the oven."

"Ah, that sounds like home!" declared the gallant Major. "And when I say home I mean the country. I fear me the city ladies trust to the bakers for such —" But Mrs. Leslie could not wait to find out what the city ladies trusted to the bakers as her cake had been in the prescribed number of minutes and the gas must be turned off and the cake turned out of the pan.

The major sniffed again. "Coffee!" was the verdict of his olefactory nerves. Like the Raggedy Man: "His old nose didn't tell no lies," for in a few minutes Mrs. Leslie returned with a tray of coffee and some hot doughnuts she had just finished frying when her bell pealed so loudly and persistently.

The guest *ummed* and *ahhed* with appreciation. He was self congratulatory that the little girl to whom he had once presented a pink parasol had grown into such a fine woman. He always had been a person of discernment and from the beginning he had known that little Polly Bainbridge was of the right sort. It was a pleasant thing to feel that a pink parasol cast on the waters might after some thirty odd years — or was it forty — be returned to one in the shape of fragrant coffee and hot doughnuts.

First, all the county news must be retailed and a bit of mild gossip concerning old neighbors be whispered. Major Simpson had long ago given up the habit of spending his holidays back home since the old folks had all died off and his ancestral halls passed into the hands of strangers. But his interest in all pertaining to his county was as strong as ever.

“ I only go back for funerals, now,” said the old man sadly. Mrs. Leslie thought of the last funeral she had attended in that part of the world, that of Mr. Leslie, and her eyes filled with tears. The gay little coffee and doughnut party seemed in danger of becoming as sad as a wake but Mrs. Leslie brushed away her tears and smiled on her guest, filling his cup and pressing upon him another doughnut. So by simple grace happiness and good cheer were restored.

“ Now tell me of your daughter. It seems strange for little Polly Bainbridge to have a grown daughter. Do you two ladies live here all alone? ”

“ Oh no! We have a lodger — Miss O’Gorman. By the way, Major Simpson, she *says* she is employed at Burnett & Burnett’s.”

Mrs. Leslie could not resist a slight emphasis on the “ says ” although she had promised Mary to try and forget the strange suspicions that had arisen in her mind concerning her gentle little lodger.

“ She says right! ” declared the Major shortly, suddenly remembering that he was a detective out on a scent. “ What do you know of the young person? ”

“ Nothing—nothing at all! She came here in answer to an advertisement my daughter and I put in a Sunday paper. We took her in without references. Come to think of it, her saying she had a position with Burnett & Burnett seemed to me all the reference I needed since you were one of the firm.”

“ No, no, dear lady—not yet—merely a trusted officer of the company. But tell me more of this Miss O’Gorman. How does she impress you? Do you feel that she is not—er—er exactly what she pretends to be? ”

“ Oh Major Simpson, it seems wrong to doubt the girl but— ”

“ But what? ”

“ She is a nice girl—a lady, in fact, but I can’t believe she is exactly what she says she is—I mean a girl with a job selling bone buttons and things. Not that there aren’t a great many ladies in shops—I don’t mean that there aren’t—and elegant gentlemen, too, but there is something about her and her clothes— ”

“ Ah! Her clothes! She seems to me to be simply dressed, more so than most of her fellow employees. ”

“ Exactly, but have you felt of them? ”

“Not exactly!” answered the detective with dignity.

“I mean the material is so good, it would take almost a month’s salary to pay for one of her dresses, unless she makes a great deal more than girls just beginning usually make. And she has all of her dresses duplicated.”

“Was it only her clothes that made you think she was different?”

“Oh no, it was the way she talks. I hadn’t really had a positive suspicion of her being something she said she wasn’t, or rather not being what she said she was, until last night when we were sitting around the table reading and sewing. Josie got to talking about noted criminals and what they did and how detectives caught them—”

“Just stuff she had read in cheap magazines, I presume.”

“No, not fiction but facts.”

The Major became as eager as a hound on trail. Here were facts—excellent things for a detective to know—and in the possession of a woman. How easy it would be for him, with his years of experience, to wheedle this artless soul into telling all she knew.

“Ah, facts! Now, er-er-my dear neighbor,

just what do you mean by facts?" asked the Major, making a great effort to appear unconcerned.

"Well, she spoke kind of familiarly of Paris and her accent sounded like our teacher's used to—not at all like pupils. I always have my doubts about anybody who has too good an accent in French. I think she felt I was suspicious of her because she shut up all of a sudden. Please tell me, Major Simpson, have you also some suspicion concerning our lodger?"

CHAPTER VI

TOO MANY DETECTIVES

Major Simpson looked at his hostess with blinking eyes. Although he had spoken scornfully of cheap magazine fiction that had no doubt put melodramatic notions in Josie's head, the truth of the matter was that the old gentleman devoured them himself in private, especially the ones dealing with crime and clever sleuths. How often in these stories unsuspecting women, landladies and lodging house keepers, were unconscious means of tracking desperate criminals. The detective came to a sudden conclusion. He determined to take into his confidence this gentle lady from his own county. Anyone who had such a light hand at doughnuts and could brew such clear rich coffee must have finesse. She was the one of all others to help him in his business of determining a difficult point in his profession. He leaned forward and grasping the widow's plump hand, patted it tenderly.

“Mrs. Leslie—Miss Polly—er-er-Polly, little

Polly Bainbridge, I wonder if you will help an old neighbor and friend in a most important matter.”

“ Help you, Major Simpson! How can a woman like me serve such a gentleman as you? ”

“ Know then, my dear Mrs. Les—I mean Polly—I may call you Polly I hope— ”

“ Certainly, Major Simpson! ”

“ Well then, my dear Polly, you have under your roof a character that is under suspicion. I serve at Burnett & Burnett’s in a confidential capacity as their trusted private detective.”

“ Land’s sakes! ” cried Mrs. Leslie, who had an inborn respect for the law and all persons appointed to uphold it. But according to plays she had seen and the movies, a detective always wore a shabby brown derby and box-toed shoes. Here was her visitor, an acknowledged detective, in the smallest and neatest of polished oxfords, and from her chair she could plainly see a silk hat on the marble topped table in the reception hall, the kind of hat that might have been worn with impunity by presidents of republics or prime ministers of monarchies.

Having under her roof, or rather under her ceiling—because Mrs. Leslie had never felt that the roof of the apartment house belonged to

her in the least—having under her ceiling a suspicious character was not nearly so exciting to that lady as harboring a live detective. She reasoned that Major Simpson must be an excellent detective since he had never divulged that it was in that capacity he served Burnett & Burnett, the opinion being in his county that he was a “kind of partner” in the firm.

Tales of mystery had always been Mrs. Leslie’s dissipation—it might be truthfully said her only dissipation—and now it was a delightful thing that what had hitherto been a dissipation should be put upon her as a duty. Surely everybody would consider it her duty to assist an old neighbor and family friend in any way possible.

“Help you! Indeed I will. Tell me what I must do first.”

“Tell me something of the life and habits of this young person, who has so imposed upon you.”

“Well, she is quiet, gentle, considerate and unassuming. I certainly have to give her that. She is never a mite of trouble but always helps Mary and me about any household tasks that come up, very much as though she were a daughter of the house.”

“Um-hum! Sly, very sly!” puffed the major.

“She is orderly and regular in her habits. Keeps her room as neat as a pin and never leaves anything lying around.”

“Afraid of giving a clue to her carryings-on. She is no doubt a hardened adventuress.”

Mrs. Leslie thrilled with excitement. She felt delightful cold chills running up and down her backbone and her eyes were snapping and her cheeks glowing as though under the spell of no less a person than Anna Katherine Green or Mary Roberts Reinhart. “The Bat” himself had not been able to make her shudder more happily. For the moment she lost all feeling for Josie, of whom she was really very fond, but thought of her only as a character in fiction and herself as the astute heroine who would track her to her lair.

“She is very much interested in Mary and me and encourages us to tell her all kinds of things about our home in the country. I am afraid we have told her many family secrets, nothing of grave importance because we have led quiet, sheltered lives up to the last few months, but just stories of the farm and Mary’s childhood and my girlhood. She is such a good listener and we have talked to her very freely.”

“Of course you have. That’s part of her game; to get information of all kinds about neighborhoods and then work some kind of fraud on them. She is more than likely to go down to our county and get in with folks there and steal the spoons and the registered letters or something. I tell you, Polly, I know their game—these slick ones. I’ll be bound she has talked mighty little about herself. Do you know any more about her home life, where she came from, what she did before she started to ‘do you’ than you did when she first came to you?”

“No, I’m afraid we don’t.”

“Exactly!”

“But tell me what you think the poor girl has done?” asked Mrs. Leslie, who could but feel sorry for criminals even though they spoke French with a French accent.

“Done! Why I have my suspicions that she had stolen from Burnett & Burnett many hundreds of dollars worth of real lace as well as a gold mesh bag that is easily worth a hundred. She is suspected by Mr. Burnett, too, but we are to go easy with her as we hope to track to their lair others who were able to get away with thousands of dollars worth of goods a few weeks ago.”

“ What makes you think she has done it? ” gasped Mrs. Leslie, her back bone continuing to tingle deliciously over such expressions as “ Track to their lair.”

“ Many things have led me to suspect her,” said the Major with impressive gravity. “ She has studiously avoided my scrutiny and when I have attempted to follow her on the street she has with great ingenuity evaded my pursuit—given me the slip, as we say in the profession.”

“ Then you have followed her? ”

“ Repeatedly! No doubt you have noticed that she seldom comes home immediately after closing hours, but walks around town, up one street and down another. Now is not that in itself a peculiar way for a nice young woman to behave? ”

“ Perhaps! ”

“ To my way of thinking it is very peculiar. Another thing is that she has ingratiated herself into the good will of many of the clerks at Burnett & Burnett’s. She has followed the same method with them that she has with you; always inviting confidence and never revealing anything concerning her own life and affairs. I have questioned some of them closely and all have nothing but good to say of Miss Josie O’Gorman. Now that in it-

self is unnatural and shows she has a sinister influence.”

“ Ah, Major Simpson, I fear you are sarcastic.”

“Not at all, my dear Miss Polly! Young women in business are just like young women in society and are chary of expressions of admiration for members of their own sex.”

“ But why do you think that my lodger has stolen these valuable articles? What proof have you? ”

“ None as yet—but that is where you are to help me. When the clerks reported the theft to me, immediately my instinct was to find this O’Gorman. It was within a minute of closing time and I would have gotten her but she seemed to divine that I was on her heels and jumped into an elevator. I followed in the next but she came up as I went down. You may imagine, my dear madam, how annoying it was to one of my years—and I may add, dignity—to be see-sawing up and down an elevator shaft in pursuit of a wretched little sandy haired girl. I give you my word I went up and down three times, always missing her like a foolish scene in a motion picture comedy. Then I took my stand at the front door, hoping to catch up with her in that way

but she evidently slipped out the back door and once more gave me the slip. Now, however, I have tracked her to her lair—if such a charming parlor as yours could be called a lair—and with your able assistance I am sure I can catch up with her.”

“ You have not told me yet how I am to assist you.”

“ Simply by keeping your eyes open and reporting to me at every turn. I want to know every detail in regard to the movements of this O’Gorman person. I should like very much to see her room. I might gather some information that would escape the notice of a novice.”

“ It seems kind of underhand—I mean on my part, but I’ll take you to her room and if I get out of this mess I never intend to advertise again for lodgers. Mary and I will have to manage somehow. I know Mary will be greatly put out when she hears of my helping you. She has taken a great fancy to Josie. You see, we both call her Josie by now.”

“ It just shows your kind heart and your daughter’s loving disposition. If I were you, Mrs. Leslie — Polly — I would not mention the matter to Miss Mary. She might feel it her duty to warn

the young woman that we are on to her tricks and she might escape. The fewer who are taken into a plot the better. But show me the young person's room—I might say lair or den, because all criminals are more or less like animals and those terms are very appropriate. To call your sweet homelike parlor by such an epithet was criminal in itself."

Josie's room was as neat as a hospital, not a thing out of place. Mrs. Leslie opened the closet where hung the several dresses of the suspiciously good material.

"Just feel of them," she demanded, and since they were merely hanging in a closet the Major did not deem it too familiar to comply with her request. It was not as though they were on the young woman's person.

"Yes, very fine quality," was his verdict, his memory harking back to early days at Burnett & Burnett's when he stood behind the counter and measured cloths. "And look at the shoes!"

Josie's one vanity being her feet, she was very particular about her shoes. Feet being one of the many vanities Major Simpson possessed he was a better judge of shoes than materials for dresses. On the floor of the closet was a neat row

of shoes all on shoe trees and all highly polished.

“ Don’t tell me! A girl standing behind a counter couldn’t afford to wear such shoes as these. Look at the cut! Look at the leather! Every heel as straight as a die and the ties of the finest grograin. Her shoes would give her away as masquerading if nothing else would. ”

The inquisitive visitor must then have a peep in the bureau drawers. All was neat as a pin. The Major, being an old bachelor and extremely fussy about his personal belongings, could but be impressed by the exquisite order of the youthful criminal’s bureau.

“ Such a pity! Such a pity! ” he muttered. “ But no doubt there is some good in the worst of them. And what is this little book? ”

He took from the back of the top drawer Josie’s precious little homemade book filled with her father’s notes.

“ Ah, ” he said with an air of finality, “ Greek! Now tell me, my dear lady, what a salesgirl wants with Greek. It is proof positive. I need look no farther. Of course I had no notion that I would find any of the purloined goods here in her room. Those, no doubt, she has taken to the home of confederates. Now my task will be to find where

those persons live and recover the stolen articles and place the criminals behind bars.”

“How terrible! I can’t think of Josie in such surroundings.”

“Remember, you are to help me, dear Polly. I can’t tell you what your assistance in this matter will mean to me. You need have no compunctions in the matter. Remember that this girl is false as sin to have palmed herself off on you and your innocent daughter. She has not considered you in the slightest. Now promise that you will telephone me if the least thing arises to increase your suspicion, or better than that, get a taxi and come to me immediately. Burnett & Burnett will reimburse you for any expenses incurred. Here is my card with my home address and telephone number in case something should occur of import between now and Monday. You promise?”

“We-e-ll ye-e-s—but somehow I—”

“Of course you have compunctions. That is your kind heart. All of the Bainbridges were kind hearted—but all of them were also noted for being law abiding. Now it is the duty of every citizen to help the law to track criminals. It is kinder to get them while they are young than wait until they are hardened to crime. Now this

young person may be saved if she is cut off from evildoing while she is yet soft and tender. She will be placed in a home of correction and taught a useful trade, while if she is allowed to escape and pursue her wicked ways she may even end on the gallows. One crime leads to another and shoplifting may develop into arson and murder.”

“All right! all right!” cried the poor distracted Mrs. Leslie. “I promise to do what you ask of me—but somehow it seems mighty inhospitable. I wish my suspicions had never been aroused.”

“Exactly! But now that they are aroused I am sure you will live up to the traditions of your excellent family and do your duty in spite of any gentle feminine compunctions you may have.”

The major had read his hostess aright. His appeal to the traditions of her family were too much for her, and although her sympathy could but be enlisted with the supposedly desperate young criminal lodging with her, she felt she must uphold law and order, and before her guest took his pompous departure she had promised him faithfully to communicate with him if the slightest suspicious action on the part of Josie evinced itself.

CHAPTER VII

THE MEDDLESOME MAJOR CALLS

The jaunt to Linden Heights had consumed a good part of Josie's afternoon but it had given her food for thought and cheered her up. Nothing so cheered Josie as a problem to solve. Why should the handsome, chilly Miss Fauntleroy give a fictitious address? Why should she be so cross and heartless in her manner with the fraudulent old beggar woman? Not that the beggar women had seemed to mind; on the contrary she had seemed highly amused by the tongue lashing from the proud beauty. Rather a pleasant old beggar woman she seemed. It was rather nice of her not to want to sell Josie the rumpled newspaper. She had seemed really distressed that she should have taken it. That was because she, Josie, had been decent to her. Josie smiled and patted the bulging pocket of her neat sport coat which still held the rumpled journal. No doubt the old woman was a fraud but she was at least a kindly, good-natured one.

As Josie turned the corner at Meadow Street she could plainly see two persons coming down the steps at No. 11. She was sure that one of them was Major Simpson and the other one the youth who lived in apartment 3, and whose identity was still a mystery to her. However, the problem of who the young man might be troubled Josie very little at that moment. What occupied her thoughts was why should Major Simpson be coming from that apartment house. Could he have been trying to find her whereabouts? If so, had the Burnett's disclosed the fact that she was employed by them, over his head as it were?

Josie had thought for a moment that Major Simpson and the youth were together, but in this she was mistaken. They had merely happened to come down the steps at the same time. The old man proceeded down the street while the young one came towards Josie. He was evidently unaware of her approach, Josie as usual wearing an aura of inconspicuousness that enabled her to pass persons without being noticed. But it so happened that as the young man got within a few feet of the girl he caught her eye. Josie was sure that for the flick of an eyelash there was recognition in his glance. Of course it might have been

that he was aware of the fact that she lived in an apartment next to the one occupied by his family. But no! That glance of recognition had something furtive in it. Again she was sure that she had seen the youth before. Something about the spacing of his features was strangely familiar, something about his chin, the contour of his olive cheek.

“ Well, time will tell, as Father used to say,” Josie mused, “ and in the meantime I must get busy about other things.”

Mrs. Leslie's manner was, to say the least, highly artificial when she greeted Josie on her return. The lady flushed and fluttered, treating Josie more like a guest than a member of the family.

“ Let me take your coat, do,” she insisted.

“ No, indeed.”

“ Would you like a cup of coffee and some fresh doughnuts? ”

“ I certainly should! But let me come to the kitchen and attend to myself.”

“ Oh no, I'll bring a tray for you.” So the hostess burdened Josie with attentions, all the time with a strained excitement in her manner.

“ I thought I saw Major Simpson coming from

this house, just as I came around the corner. Could it have been he? He is Burnett & Burnett's private detective."

Mrs. Leslie was not a good dissembler but remembering the policy laid out for her by Major Simpson, she at first pretended she had burnt her hand on the coffee pot and must run put some soda on it and then when Josie repeated her question she feigned not to hear aright.

"Simpkins? Nobody has been here of that name."

"No, Simpson—Major Simpson—perhaps he has acquaintances in the building. There was no reason why I should jump to the conclusion that he had been here, certainly no personal reason."

Josie did not push her inquiry because she realized that for some reason or other Mrs. Leslie was concealing something from her in regard to Major Simpson. What it was she could not divine, but the lady's heightened color and strained, artificial manner meant something besides the usual Saturday baking. Her deliberate misunderstanding of the name of Simpson was too apparent to fool the astute Josie. She came to the conclusion that the old detective had been calling on Mrs. Leslie and for some reason she

had been told by him to keep the matter a secret.

“Mysteries and more mysteries!” thought Josie. “I wonder what Father would have said to this.”

As soon as she finished her luncheon of coffee and doughnuts she went to her room, determined to read a little in her leather bound book. She opened the top drawer. A sudden consciousness came to her that someone had been meddling there during her absence. In the first place her beloved book was not as she had placed it—close in the corner, back out—but had evidently been examined by someone and then tossed carelessly back into the drawer.

“Don’t be such an old maid!” Josie admonished herself. “It doesn’t mean a thing. Perhaps Mrs. Leslie had some curiosity about my belongings. It is pardonable for a poor lady who has mighty little to occupy her mind to open up a lodger’s drawer and snoop around a little.”

Wait, what was that? Certainly Mrs. Leslie did not wear heavy gold cuff links, in fact Josie had noted particularly that her landlady’s house dresses were all made with sleeves cut a little below the elbow and that she never wore cuffs. She, then, was not the meddler who had left evidence

of his or her presence in Josie's top drawer in the shape of part of a heavy gold cuff link. Josie picked it up gingerly. There was a large heavily engraved letter S on the flat button.

"If he had left a visiting card for me I could not be more certain that old Major Simpson has been calling," laughed Josie to herself. "But why? And why is Mrs. Leslie so silent about it? And above all, how am I to act now? One thing sure, I must not let the poor dear lady know that I am on to the fact that she is concealing something from me. I don't believe Mary is in on this mystery, whatever it is, but I'll wait until she comes home and test it."

Josie put the broken link carefully away in her purse and then sat down to do a little necessary mending on her coat, a button loose here and a tiny rip in one of the pockets. She drew forth the twisted afternoon paper, throwing it carelessly on the bed and again she thought of the proud Miss Fauntleroy and her rudeness to the old beggar woman. She heard Mary come in and her mother's question:

"Did you bring an afternoon paper?"

"Oh, I forgot! I'll run get you one immediately. I'm so sorry, Mother."

Josie smiled. Mary always forgot the paper on Saturday afternoon and Mrs. Leslie never forgot to ask her about it.

“ I have the early edition,” Josie called from her room. “ Don’t go out again, Mary. It’s rather rumpled but I guess I can smooth it out.”

Josie reached for the afternoon paper and began straightening it out just as Mrs. Leslie appeared at the half opened door of the bedroom. The girl was astonished to find that there was a parcel of some sort wrapped within the folds of the paper. It dropped out on the bed and then slipped to the floor. Mrs. Leslie stepped forward and stooped to pick it up but Josie, ever quick and agile, was before her. The tissue paper package tore and disclosed a crumpled mass of filmy lace and, gleaming through its folds, a golden mesh purse.

“ What is that? ” demanded Mrs. Leslie sharply.

“ I’m sure I don’t know. It seemed to be wrapped up in the afternoon paper which has been reposing in my pocket all afternoon,” said Josie, coolly. “ How it got there I’ll leave you to find out. I must hurry out again as I find I have an important matter to attend to.”

Josie's quick eye had recognized a Burnett & Burnett tag on the purse and her quicker mind had traveled like lightning back to the time Miss Fauntleroy had angrily twisted the paper and cast it in the old beggar's basket. Then she remembered how loath the old woman had been to let her buy that particular paper.

She stuffed the parcel of lace in her pocket, placed the delicately wrought mesh bag in her own purse, and without waiting to hear what Mrs. Leslie had to say she hurried into the street and hailed a passing taxi.

CHAPTER VIII

MARY KEEPS THE FAITH

“ Stop her! Stop her! ” Mrs. Leslie called to Mary. “ She’s a thief — an out and out thief! ”

“ Mother! You must be demented! ” exclaimed Mary. “ Do calm yourself. You can’t mean Josie O’Gorman. ”

“ I do mean Josie O’Gorman and I rue the day we ever took her in. I thought all the time her French accent was too good to be true. Now I have seen what she has stolen — seen it with my own eyes. Her clothes are of too good material for a girl who can’t make very large wages and her shoes are too fine for one who rents a little room from us — ”

“ Mother, Mother! Please calm yourself and tell me what you are talking about. What has Josie seemed to have stolen, because I am sure she has only seemed to have. I could swear she is honest — swear it on the Bible. ”

“ Major Simpson was right — horribly right —

and now I must get hold of him immediately — I promised — Oh, but I also promised not to let you know anything about it and here I have blurted it out.” Mrs. Leslie was walking up and down the living room like a caged tigress, literally tearing her hair.

“ Now, Mother, take this dose of aromatic spirits of ammonia and then sit down and tell me quietly all that is troubling you.”

“ Here, give me the ammonia, but I haven’t time to sit down. I must phone to Major Simpson as soon as possible. Thank goodness we have had a phone put in. Only suppose we did not have one. What a time I would have. I’d have to dress myself and go out on the street and maybe wait in line at a public booth.”

“ Major Simpson! Who on earth? Is he the old gentleman from our county you used to know when you were a little girl — the one who gave you a pink parasol once? ”

“ Yes, the same — and he has been here to see me — so kind and courtly — so anxious for our welfare — so pleased to see me and anxious to meet you. He is Burnett & Burnett’s private detective and is on the track of this Josie O’Gorman. I promised to help him and now that I

have actually seen her with the stolen goods in her pocket I am going to tell him about it.”

“ Oh, Mother, you surely cannot bring yourself to shame a dear girl like Josie. She can explain it I am sure. She is a member of the family and our duty is to protect her.”

“ Not at all! Our duty is to bring her to justice. The law is the law and we have no right to take it in our own hands. I am not saying I am not fond of Josie—I cannot help liking her although I have seen, with my own eyes, stuff in her coat pocket; a great bunch of lace that Major Simpson says is worth hundreds of dollars and a gold mesh purse, imported and worth I don’t know how much. She saw I saw too, and when I asked her what she meant by having the things she said she was sure she didn’t know but would leave me to find out and then she hurried out as cool as you please. Major Simpson had just told me, not fifteen minutes before, that those identical things had been stolen from the shop and he had a kind of idea from various things that had occurred that Josie was the shoplifter they have been trying to catch for months. Indeed I think he is a marvelously clever gentleman to track her as he did. I promised

him I would help if the slightest thing that looked suspicious should turn up, and now I must keep my word.”

Mrs. Leslie took down the receiver of the recently installed telephone and consulting the card Major Simpson had left with her, called a number.

“Mother, Mother!” cried Mary. “The only reason I can bear your doing this is that I know dear Josie can explain. Perhaps it is best to give her a chance rather than to go on suspecting her of a heinous crime. As soon as she comes in I shall quite frankly ask an explanation of her and I am sure she will be as anxious to clear her name of this charge as I am to have it cleared.”

Mrs. Leslie could not answer her daughter as at that moment she heard Major Simpson on the line.

“Yes, Major, it is Mrs. Leslie — Polly Bainbridge that was. That girl has come in and with my own eyes I have seen a package of lace that looked as fine as fine can be and a beautiful little gold mesh purse.

“Where is she, you say? Gone! Gone in the twinkling of an eye. Up and out before I could say

‘ boo ’ to her. She just stuffed the things in her pocket when she realized I had seen them and without endeavoring to make the least explanation, but feigning a kind of stupid ignorance of what she was doing with them, she clapped on her hat, pulled on her coat, and was gone.

“ Will she come back, you say? I don’t know Major Simpson, I am sure. She has left all her things here, but I should think she would be afraid to come back when she knows I know she has stolen those things. I have no idea where she went. She just said she had urgent business to attend to and was gone.

“ Could I swear to the things? Well, Major Simpson, I should hate to have to, but if the worst comes to the worst I certainly can put my hand on the Bible and swear that I saw Josie O’Gorman put in her pocket a parcel from which had fallen a gold mesh purse with one of Burnett & Burnett’s tags on it and that the parcel certainly contained a great deal of filmy lace. How much I could not say as it was twisted up into a tight package. I am sorry, Major, but my daughter was in the apartment at the time and I was forced to tell her of what I had learned about our lodger. Yes, she is very sad over it and says

she will ask the girl all about it as soon as she returns. Mary is just like her father, so kind that she thinks nobody in the world is wicked.

“ Oh, you say she must not mention the matter to Miss O’Gorman. All right, Major Simpson! Mary is a good girl and I am sure she will obey me, but she is so fond of this Miss O’Gorman that it will go hard with her to help trap the poor thing. Yes, of course I understand it is our duty to aid the law where criminals are concerned. I’ll do all I can, but it goes against the grain somehow. Yes, she was right down brazen about the things being in her room. Of course she didn’t know I knew anything about them—in fact, I pretended I didn’t hear her when she asked if you had been here. She thought she saw you coming out of the house as she turned the corner. Of course that shows she has a guilty conscience to think you had been here. Well, Major Simpson, I’ll do my best, not only because it is my duty but because you are an old neighbor. I’ll call you if she comes back. Oh, of course I must pretend it is some other matter and not call your name because she could hear me phoning. Perhaps I’d better go out to a public booth. That would be best.

“ You say just call your number and ask for Mr. Silvester and say ‘ The lemons have come ’ and you will understand? That will be fine. Well, good bye! ”

Mary had listened to the foregoing harangue with a sinking heart. It was easy to gather from her mother’s part in the conversation what the old gentleman’s share had been. She well knew her mother’s failing, if failing it was, a love of a mystery and how she had always flattered herself that she knew human nature. She also knew that her mother’s kind heart always got the better of what she was pleased to call ‘ her better judgment,’ and if matters should come to a showdown that she would probably expend more energy in her endeavor to protect a criminal than in convicting one. Mary was sure that her friend was innocent and it was sorely against her will that she was made to promise that in the event of Josie’s return to the apartment she would say nothing to her about lace, mesh bags, shoplifting or portly old private detectives.

“ Just be perfectly natural in your manner,” commanded her mother. “ Behave as I do — not that I think she will return. It would be entirely too dangerous now that she suspects Ma-

jor Simpson has been here. She certainly realizes that I saw the purloined articles."

"But her clothes! What will she do without her clothes?"

"Why, my dear, criminals of that sort never stop for clothes. She may have rooms all over the city as far as we know and as many aliases as she has rooms. There is no telling how long she has been living in Wakely. Major Simpson says these robberies have been going on ever so long at Burnett & Burnett's and he rather thinks this girl may be responsible for all of them."

"Oh, Mother! I can't believe this is really you talking this way. Why, Josie is almost like a sister to me I have grown so fond of her, and I am sure she loves you dearly. If we should have suspicion cast on us she would not believe we were wicked but would do her best to help us. After all, you have not a thing to go on but what a silly old man says."

"Major Silvester Simpson is far from being a silly old man. He is an elegant, courtly gentleman," Mrs. Leslie retaliated with some heat. "He is not only from our county but from the very best blood in the county, and what he says and thinks has much more weight with me than

protestations of innocence from a little Miss Nobody.”

Mary felt that silence was the only thing with which to combat her mother's argument, so with a sad face, and wiping away a few tears that she could not keep back, she endeavored to lose herself in a book until Josie should return, for certain she was that their little lodger would return.

Mary and her mother were usually in accord and both of them felt exceedingly uncomfortable that a disagreement had arisen. Mrs. Leslie busied herself with her embroidery, looking up every now and then at her daughter and sighing involuntarily. Mary endeavored to read but tears would dim her eyes which necessitated a furtive use of her handkerchief. Both of them missed the gay intimate chatter that it was their custom to indulge in. Mary was the first to break the silence.

“By the way, Mother, I saw another beggar in the hall. This time it was an old woman, at least her hair was gray, though she certainly could step along at a lively rate. I saw her actually running up the steps exactly as though a mad dog was after her. I was coming in our door and my impression was that she was going

in No. 3, but it looked kind of prying for me to wait and see. That Mrs. Kambourian must be a very charitable lady with the tramp mark on her door."

"Well, well! What have we come to? I think you and I had better go back to the country, Mary, what with beggars and shoplifters right in the same house with us. Now in the country we never had such things happen."

Mary laughed.

"But, Mother, remember how the Taylor's dog killed our sheep; and weasels slit the throats of the chickens; and the turtles in the branch got our ducklings; and the crows ate the corn before it had time to sprout; and the city man shot your prize gobbler thinking it was a wild turkey; and old Uncle Eben's pipe burnt up the tobacco barn."

"Yes, yes, but none of those things were human beings doing wrong, not even Uncle Eben's pipe. Here in the city it is human beings that worry a poor woman to death."

"Are you so worried, Mother? I thought you were rather enjoying yourself."

"Well, Mary, I believe you are right. I am enjoying myself and feel that I am living in the pages of an exciting detective story."

“ If only it has a happy ending! ” sighed Mary. “ In detective tales the one you think did the crime never is the right one and I believe this tale will work out that way. I am sure my dear Josie will prove to be as good as we have thought she was all the time.”

“ Perhaps you are right, Mary. Anyhow we must read the story to the end and not skip any. If Josie is innocent it will all come out in the last chapter.”

Then mother and daughter kissed and were happy again as they sat and waited for the detective story to develop.

CHAPTER IX

WHO IS MISS FAUNTLEROY

Josie's taxi carried her quickly to the home of Mr. Theodore Burnett. Fortunately she found him in. The old colored butler who answered the bell seemed greatly astonished that a young lady should be calling on the master of the house and not on his mother and sisters.

"You mean Ol' Miss, don't you lady, I mean Mrs. Burnett and Miss Lily an' Miss May? They's all to home an' I wouldn't be 'stonished if they ain't 'spectin' of you 'case they done tol' me tea in the settin' room at five sharp."

"No, Uncle," laughed Josie, "this is a business call and I must see Mr. Burnett immediately. Please give him my card."

"All right, lady, but — well all right! I reckon I mought jes' as well take you right off in ter the liberry if you air so 'terminated lak ter see the boss. He ain't so partial ter doin' business of a Sat'day. Don't you reckon you mought postpone it 'til Monday?"

“ No, I must see him now. If you take him my card I am sure he will see me.”

“ Yassum, but I hate ter pester him so. He’s worried enough what with sneak thieves a liftin’ goods off’n the sto’ right under the nose of these here detecertives he done pay out so much money to. I hearn him a tellin’ Ol’ Miss sumpen ’bout it at lunch time.”

“ Where is the library? ” asked Josie, determination in her voice.

“ Well, lady, it air right back yonder — ”

“ What is the matter, Uncle Abe? ” The question was asked by a pleasant looking young woman whose likeness to Mr. Theodore Burnett gave Josie the assurance that she was his sister. She had overheard sounds of an altercation from the upper hall and leaning over the bannisters spied Josie.

“ I must see Mr. Burnett immediately,” said the girl. “ It is important and I beg of you to inform him that I am here. I am Miss O’Gorman from the store.”

“ O-O-h! Are you really? ” and Miss Lily Burnett sailed down the stairs rapidly. “ My brother has told us a lot about you and we have been anxious to meet you. Uncle Abe, you must

tell Mr. Teddy immediately that Miss O'Gorman is here. Please come in, and when you and Brother Teddy get through your business talk we will be so glad if you will have tea with us. Now don't say 'no.' "

There was a sweet frankness about Miss Lily Burnett's voice and manner that appealed to Josie but she felt that for the time being she must forego the pleasure of tea with the family of her employer.

"I am very sorry, but I am too busy to stop with you to-day," she said.

"Well then, promise another day!" and Josie promised and was at last shown into the library where the master of the house and the junior partner of the firm sat in some dejection, attempting to read but evidently restless and preoccupied.

"Miss O'Gorman!" Mr. Theodore exclaimed, jumping up. "I have been wondering how I could get hold of you. Of course I had your address but no telephone number. I have wanted very much to have a talk with you ever since Major Simpson told me he was going to hunt you up. He found you, did he not? I don't know how the old fellow happened to catch on to your

being what you are. He is more astute than we thought. Perhaps calling himself a detective for so many years has finally made him one."

Josie began to laugh.

"He has found out where I live and as far as I can make out he has sworn my landlady to secrecy in regard to his having tracked me. He has a mystery up his sleeve and for the life of me I cannot make it out. But I am not here to discuss Major Simpson and you have not told me why you wanted to talk to me. First let me ask you if a shoplifter has been at work again and carried off several yards of exquisite lace and a gold mesh bag? "

"How did you find that out? Major Simpson must have had a leakage somewhere. Ah, perhaps you have seen one of the sales ladies? "

"Worse and more of it! I have found the goods in my own pocket." Josie produced the stolen articles and laid them on the library table. "It seems almost too good to be true that my pocket was the one chosen, and it also convinces me that my father was right when he declared truth to be stranger than fiction. A real detective tale would never sell with such a thing as this happening in it."

She then recounted in detail the story of how Miss Fauntleroy bought the paper and then twisting it up angrily returned it to the old newsie, and how the woman seemed genuinely distressed that she, Josie, should take the rumpled paper.

“Of course these two are the ones to watch now — Miss Fauntleroy and the old beggar woman at your back entrance. Miss Fauntleroy does not live at the address she gave Burnett & Burnett.”

“Are you sure? How do you know?”

“Yes, I am sure, and I know because this afternoon I went out to the address she gave and there is nothing but a frog pond at that number on Linden Row, Linden Heights. In fact, there are no houses at all on Linden Row. It has but recently been put on the market — a half-hearted attempt at a real estate boom, I fancy, and the houses are all ‘castles in Spain.’ The question now is: Where does Miss Fauntleroy live and what connection has she with the beggar at the gate? We must go very quietly so as not to scare her off. I am a little uneasy now that you tell me Major Simpson is to cooperate with me.”

“Ah, but I did not say that! Merely that he seems to be aware of the fact that you are not

just a shop girl. He came to the office in great excitement a little while after the theft was reported and wanted your address. He seemed to think that through you he might track the whole gang, if gang there is, of shoplifters.”

“That being the case, why should he be so secret about it when once he found my address? Why should he not wait until I got home and talk the thing over with me? Why should he persuade Mrs. Leslie, the dear lady with whom I am boarding, to keep so dark about his having been there? Why, Mr. Burnett, he has even snooped around my bedroom and peeped in my bureau drawers.”

“Surely not, Miss O’Gorman! How do you know?”

“I know because a little book, of which I am very fond, had been moved.”

“Taken away?”

“Oh no, just turned around with the edges out instead of in. I always put it in the corner of my drawer, turning the back out.”

Mr. Burnett laughed. “Heaven’s above! What an inventory taker you would make — or house-keeper for Sherlock Holmes. But, my dear young lady, why should you think that poor old Sylves-

ter Simpson was guilty of such — such sacrilege? Could not your nice landlady have done that? Did he leave finger prints on the book and have you examined it with a magnifying glass? ”

“ No doubt he did and I would have examined it and perhaps photographed the finger prints had it been necessary, but the deft detective did worse things than leave finger prints,” answered Josie, good naturedly accepting her employer’s banter.

“ What could be worse? ”

“ His cuff link broke in my drawer,” she said, producing the telltale bit of gold. “ Would you like to see Major Simpson when I supply the missing link? ”

“ I should, above all things. But seriously, what do you make of his behavior? ”

“ What do you? ”

“ Answered like an Irishman! You know an Irishman always answers an unanswerable question by asking another,” laughed Mr. Burnett. “ Frankly, I don’t know; but then, I am a plain merchant and not a young lady detective. If I had to answer your question off hand I think I should say that the old man has gone a little crazy and thinks you are the shoplifter — ”

“ Exactly! ” cried Josie. “ You have hit the nail on the head, Mr. Burnett, and I give you all credit for solving the mystery of ‘ The Major and the Maiden.’ I find very often in my work that the sane opinion of a sensible business man who makes no pretense of being able to unscrew the inscrutable is worth more than all the sleuthing in the world. I don’t know why I did not think of that myself. Of course he thinks I am responsible for all thefts past, present and future. That is the reason he has been following me around so much. And just think, I thought it was because he knew about my father.”

Then Josie laughed heartily at her own stupidity, and Mr. Burnett joined in. At that moment his sister Lily put her head in the library door and the other sister, May, looked in over Lily’s shoulder and they laughed, too. Although they hadn’t the slightest idea what it was all about, they were sure it was a good joke that was bringing forth such spontaneous merriment from their much admired brother.

“ Now, Brother Teddy, you need not pretend you and Miss O’Gorman are discussing private business matters if you are laughing like that. There could not possibly be anything about busi-

ness that would be so funny,” declared Lily. “I met Miss O’Gorman in the hall. Now I want May to meet her and I want both of you to come on in the living room and have some tea.”

“Indeed we will,” declared Mr. Burnett. “I have been wanting Miss O’Gorman to let you call on her ever since she has been here, but she is such a stickler in a way for business etiquette that she has refused. Now, Sister Lily, we have her in spite of herself.”

Josie did not mind at all being had in spite of herself. The day had been a trying one and it was pleasant to sit by the cheerful grate fire in the comfortable, homelike living room and have Lily and May serve the tea while she talked to Mr. Burnett and his charming old mother, who was a delightfully witty old lady in voluminous skirts and a dainty lace cap — a veritable “Ol’ Miss.”

“Now, Miss O’Gorman, I want you to tell the ladies of my family all about it. They are very remarkable women and know when to keep secrets. I am sure what you tell them will go no farther. My mother is a great reader of mystery tales and she will be vastly interested in what you have to say.”

So Josie told all the happenings since she had come to Wakely — not that much had happened except Major Simpson's dogging of her every move — until that very day when things had moved fast and furiously.

“ And you actually have the stolen things right here in this house? ” asked the mother.

“ Right here,” said the son, and he went to the library and brought back the purloined articles. “ Of course the ridiculous part of it all is that Major Simpson thinks Miss O’Gorman is a clever shoplifter instead of being about the most successful female detective we have anywhere.”

“ Oh please — ” blushed Josie.

“ Well, you know you are, at least that is what your Captain Lonsdale says. I am wondering what old Simp will say when he finds out the goods have been returned.”

“ Of course he will say that he knew all the time I had the things and I brought them back because I was afraid of your sending me to jail. By the way, if I had been a thief it would certainly have been a dramatic move to bring the things to you. It would have disarmed you completely, would it not? ”

“ I guess it would.”

“ And now I must go,” said Josie. “ I am wondering all the time what my dear friends the Leslies are thinking about me. Mrs. Leslie saw the lace and gold bag as soon as I did and she expressed her astonishment. Heavens! Do you think Major Simpson could have informed her of the theft this afternoon? Of *course* he did and now Mary and her mother think I am the guilty party.”

CHAPTER X

“ THE WATERMELONS HAVE COME ”

Mr. Burnett would not hear of Josie's leaving until he had ordered his car.

“ I'll take you myself,” he insisted.

“ But suppose Major Simpson sees us,” laughed Josie.

“ Oh, won't that be delicious? ” from May.
“ Do you fancy he will think Brother Teddy is shoplifting from himself? ”

“ Of course, if he sees me driving around with a bunch of lace and a gold mesh bag he could come to no other conclusion.”

“ Well! I have been called many things, but never before a bunch of lace and a gold mesh bag,” said Josie, buttoning her neat sport coat.
“ Wait, let me see that there is nothing in my pockets that does not belong to me, because if I don't look out I'll be arrested yet.”

“ Now, my dear,” said Mrs. Burnett, “ I am going to make you promise to come and dine with us very soon. I want to hear some of the many

tales of the criminals you have caught up with. I know you think that is a strange taste for an old lady like me, but I simply dote on detective stories and I am sure you know interesting things that don't get in books."

"Please do! Please do!" chorused the sisters, and Josie promised, although she had her doubts about the advisability of accepting such an invitation, certainly not until the shoplifting plot was unraveled.

Mr. Theodore Burnett's car was a new one, large and elegant, with silver mountings, and painted a midnight blue. Josie could not resist a sly smile at herself when the owner helped her in so carefully. She wondered what Min and Gertie and Jane would say could they see her riding around in such luxury.

"Perhaps you had better let me out at the corner and not take me all the way to my door," she suggested.

"Nonsense!" insisted Mr. Burnett. "I am not accustomed to dumping young ladies at the corner."

As it was a well known fact that Mr. Theodore Burnett was not accustomed to driving young ladies around at all, and since young ladies must

be driven before they can be dumped, no doubt he was speaking the truth. Nevertheless, Josie insisted on being dumped, if not at the corner, at least not in front of the shabby apartment house. He compromised by bringing the car to a standstill four doors from No. 11.

Had Josie not been so occupied in bidding Mr. Burnett good-bye she would have seen that Mrs. Leslie was on the stoop of the apartment house, peering anxiously into the winter twilight. She had seen the handsome car pass and drive up to the curb and then her little lodger alight with the courteous assistance of a very good looking gentleman verging onto middle age.

As the afternoon wore on Mrs. Leslie's concern for Josie had outweighed her suspicions. Suppose she did not come back—what then would happen to her? She regretted exceedingly that she had permitted herself to be drawn into Major Simpson's plot to entrap the young girl. Who could tell what temptations she had had? She thought of her own Mary. Her life had been sheltered, her rearing, careful, her training, Christian. Perhaps Josie O'Gorman had never known a mother's and father's care. Was it the part of a Christian woman with a daughter of

her own to try to catch and bring to justice a poor young thing who trusted her — she might even say loved her? How much better it would be to warn the girl and try to reform her than betray her and have her sent to prison where no doubt she would be taught a lesson but in the teaching might become a hardened criminal. Certainly Josie was no hardened criminal yet. Criminal she might be but there was something very kind and sweet about the poor thing.

“ If only I had not promised Major Simpson! ” she said to herself over and over. “ If only I had not told him about the lace and the gold mesh bag! He is started now and there is no stopping him. It would be different if Josie was the kind of girl that flirted or ran around with men. There is nothing like that about her at all. She is so refined, so circumspect. She may be a kleptomaniac, poor little thing, and not be able to resist stealing. I have a great mind to go in the house this minute and phone the Major that I will no longer aid and abet him in this cruel pursuit of the poor young thing.”

Mrs. Leslie had come out on the stoop for the third time, hoping and yet fearing to see Josie returning. Just as she had come to the conclu-

sion to give her old neighbor and friend an ultimatum concerning her lodger — since she was so refined and was not the kind of girl to flirt or go joy riding with strange men — the large blue car came rolling up the street past No. 11 and stopped a few doors off.

Meadow was a quiet street, shabby and unpretentious. Few handsome automobiles passed that way and if they did they seldom stopped. Mrs. Leslie was attracted by its new and shining splendor and when it came to a full stop close to the curb and no less a person than her abused lodger alighted and stood for a moment talking gaily with the handsome, well dressed owner of the car, Mrs. Leslie's heart hardened again and she hurried into the house to inform the Major that the prodigal had returned.

“ What number? What number? ” was all the satisfaction Mrs. Leslie could get from her new telephone. Of course this was most irritating when she wanted to get the message over to Major Simpson before Josie should get in the apartment. The operator was stupid or the line was crossed or something, at any rate Josie was in the hall before the connection was made. Then the distracted lady was sure that Major Simp-

son at the other end bellowed quite loud enough for Josie to hear him, although she was all the way across the room from the telephone.

“ Well! Well! This is Sylvester Simpson — Major Simpson of Burnett & Burnett’s. What is it? Who are you? What do you want? ”

Mrs. Leslie could hardly refrain from calling him an old idiot. If he had not come from her county and belonged to such a highly respectable family she would have done so. As it was she merely said: “ Hello! Hello! ” all the time trying to remember what she was to say if Josie got back. She knew it was something connected with picnics, but the major’s bellowing and stupidity had driven it from her mind. She did not know why she had connected the cryptic code with picnics — she couldn’t remember that or anything else. She only knew that Josie O’Gorman had come driving up in a very handsome blue car and had been standing chatting very intimately with a handsome stranger when, so far as she knew, her lodger had no acquaintances in Wakely. Why had the car not stopped in front of the apartment house? That in itself was shady. She also knew that she had promised Major Silvester Simpson to let him know when

Josie returned if she ever did return. She was to name no names but merely say that something that was in some way connected with picnics had come. She tried to think, but the Major's impatient “ Well! Well! ” at the other end drove all coherency from her thoughts. She must say something or she was sure the impatient old man would pull his telephone out by the roots.

“ The watermelons have come! ” she gasped. “ They just came — the watermelons! ” and then she heard a great spluttering at the other end of the line and a faint: “ Is that you Polly? ”

“ Yes sir! ” she said, and hung up the receiver.

“ Watermelons! This time of the year? ” questioned Josie curiously, and then realized that something had happened and was still happening. Mrs. Leslie's cheeks were burning and her usually tidy hair had escaped from its net and was standing out in a far from respectable manner. She looked at Josie with sad, unfriendly eyes, and her mouth trembled as she said:

“ Good evening! ”

“ Good evening! ” returned Josie. “ I — I hope nothing is the matter, Mrs. Leslie. ”

“ Matter! Nothing that I know of. ” But Mrs. Leslie was too honest to dissemble and suddenly

she lost all control of herself and sinking into a chair, burst into tears.

“ Oh, my dear, my dear! ” cried Josie kneeling by her side. “ Please, please, Mrs. Leslie, tell me if anything is the matter. Where is Mary? ”

Mrs. Leslie pointed to the closed bedroom door.

“ Not ill? ”

She shook her head in mute denial.

“ Is it something connected with me — with me and Major Simpson that has upset you so? ”

The lady did not speak, but a tightening of the hand which Josie held gave the girl to understand that it was something to do with her and the old detective that was making her weep.

“ And the watermelons — are they a private dish or am I to have a slice? Come now, my dear friend, for you are dear friends — both you and Mary — please tell me what it is all about. I feel you are angry with me about something and distrust me in some way. I must have a talk with you and Mary.”

Mary, whose door was not so tightly closed that she could not hear her name mentioned, came quickly into the living room. She, too, had been weeping, but her mother's wild message concern-

ing watermelons had brought on a fit of uncontrollable laughter and now she was verging on hysterics. She tried to speak but could only giggle helplessly.

Josie looked at mother and daughter with a quizzical expression as much as to say: “ Well what next? ” Then she drew Mary to a seat and standing in the middle of the room she spoke in a tone of patient gentleness and humility.

“ I feel sure that something has arisen to make you doubt and distrust me. I am to blame for this because I have been concealing something from you that no doubt I should have told you long ago, but my profession is such that it is wiser and safer to keep my own counsel.”

“ Oh — hh! ” shuddered Mrs. Leslie. “ Don’t tell us anything that you will regret. You can get away now if you go immediately and wild horses will not drag from me where you have gone. Indeed, you need not even tell me where you are going — but go quickly, poor child.”

“ Are you sending me away? ”

“ Not sending you, just allowing you to go before it is too late. I may get into trouble for warning you but I don’t care. I cannot see you put behind bars.” Mrs. Leslie wept afresh.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. LESLIE WON TO THE CAUSE

“ No doubt I deserve it,” said Josie solemnly.

“ Even if you do I cannot bear to think of your being there and, although it is not quite honorable of me to do so, I am going to assist you to run away. Honor isn’t everything. A woman must be human first and a human being could not stand by and see a poor young thing like you branded as a criminal with a terrible jail sentence staring you in the face.”

“ But, my dear lady, I have not confessed to being a real criminal—only not quite honest in that— ”

“ But there is no line to draw where honesty is concerned. That is what you shall have to learn. One is either honest or dishonest—but you are so young— ”

“ But, Mrs. Leslie, what do you and Mary think I have done? ”

“ Not me! ” cried Mary. “ I am sure of you,

Josie. I simply *know* you have done nothing wrong."

"Thank you, Mary! Then what does your mother think I have done?"

"Think — why, you poor dear child, I know you are a thief — at least a shoplifter," blurted out Mrs. Leslie. "Major Simpson has been keeping his eye on you for weeks and weeks and he has at last rounded you up. Oh, why do we stand here and talk? You must be leaving before he gets here. I have telephoned him that you have come back."

"Ah — then I am the watermelons," laughed Josie.

"Yes, I meant lemons but I got so mixed because I was excited. I knew it was something people take to picnics and watermelons are good to take although they are only the shipped Georgia melons we get for the Fourth of July. All the time it was lemonade I was thinking about. Anyhow watermelons was nearer to it than sandwiches would have been. I know you think I am crazy but I'm not."

"No, I know very well you are exceedingly sane," said Josie gently. "You are simply overwrought and are thinking aloud. But now tell

me what it is. You mean you have telephoned Major Simpson that I have come back and he will be along soon with the handcuffs? ”

“ Oh-h-h! Not that! ”

“ Perhaps not,” smiled Josie, “ but I think you had better let me make a clean breast of the whole affair and then we will decide what is to be done. In the first place, I am not a shop girl at all — ”

“ Didn’t I tell you? ” Mrs. Leslie said to Mary.

“ Please don’t interrupt, Mother,” begged Mary.

“ But I am a detective brought here from Dorfield by Burnett & Burnett to find out who has been shoplifting so successfully,” Josie continued.

“ Another detective! ” gasped Mrs. Leslie.

“ Yes, although I must say that poor old Major Simpson hardly deserves to be called one. I have thought it best not to tell anyone what brought me to Wakely since both Mr. Charles and Mr. Theodore Burnett were opposed to letting Major Simpson know they had employed someone over his head, as it were. It seems he has never yet detected a thing about anybody, and while they do not want to hurt his feelings they

are determined to track the thieves if possible. I was recommended to the firm as a capable person and was employed by them. We felt I could accomplish more if I had a job in the store and that is how I came to tell you that I was a shop girl. I have never liked having to conceal my real profession from you and Mary but it had to be done. Major Simpson from the first seemed to have a peculiar interest in me and I thought it was because he had heard of my father. Perhaps you have never heard of him, but he was one of the greatest and cleverest of detectives."

"Not Detective O'Gorman?" cried Mrs. Leslie. "Not the man who found Margaret Carson, the millionaire baby! Not the one who tracked down the famous counterfeiters at Dempsey's Mill by hiding in a meal sack for a whole day and night! Not the one who proved the old maid sister had put rat poison in the chicken salad at the wedding just to get even with the young man who was marrying her sister all because one time he had shot her cat for stealing chickens! Oh, Josie, to think of my having you right here under my — my ceiling for all these weeks and not knowing you were Detective O'Gorman's daughter. Why, my husband and I never missed a thing

he did in the way of detecting crime and we followed every inch of his work if we could just get hold of it. Of course I knew he lived in Washington and if you had ever mentioned Washington I might have guessed, but you see, you never did."

"No, I never did," said Josie, whose eyes were full of tears. How often she had mentioned her father, expecting him to be known and remembered, and how often she had been mortified at the ignorance of other persons. Now, here was this quiet country woman who had not even known how to punch on an electric light until she came to Wakely to live, yet she knew all about the great O'Gorman and gave him all honor and praise.

"Go on, Josie! I did not mean to interrupt, but I just had to. I wish my dear husband could have met you. He was the one that got me so interested in detective tales. But go on!"

"I believe I left off where I realized Major Simpson took an interest in me. This interest manifested itself in a peculiar way but I did not realize until this afternoon what the poor old man thought. I was so sure he was trying to find out O'Gorman methods of detecting that I

went blindly on my way. The fact is, I teased the old fellow. He used to follow me around the street and I'd keep him guessing and then lose him. It is a very easy thing to do."

"The Sylvester Simpsons are very good people," murmured Mrs. Leslie, but Mary gave her a beseeching glance and she desisted from further interruptions.

"I have been walking the streets of Wakely a great deal because I have been determined to find out where the many employees of Burnett & Burnett's live, as well as something about their habits. You see, Mr. Charles Burnett had a suspicion that the shoplifting was done from the inside. So while Major Simpson was under the impression that I was playing hide and seek with him I have really been on my job, which did not stop with closing time at the store. This afternoon I went out to Linden Heights to track down a young person and found she has given a fictitious address."

"Oh, how exciting!" exclaimed Mrs. Leslie. "Why do you suppose — ?"

"I don't know but I am going to find out. A whole lot of things have happened this afternoon that I have to find out about. In the first place,

there was a theft of some priceless lace and a mesh bag — ”

“ Oh — h! I forgot that! ” cried Mrs. Leslie. “ And what were you doing with those things? That is what has been worrying me sick. ”

“ I told you I did not know when you asked me before, and I told you the truth. Since then a gleam of light has been shed on how I got those things but it is such a faint gleam that I feel it best not to say anything more about it until I can see more clearly myself. I am going to ask you and Mary to trust me a little longer in so far as the lace and gold bag being found in my pocket is concerned. ”

“ Indeed I have always trusted you, Josie, ” declared Mary.

“ Well I must say I haven’t, ” said Mrs. Leslie, stoutly, “ and I’d like to know now where those things are. Major Simpson will be coming along here before you know it and I am not willing for him to find them in my apartment. Where are they, Josie? ”

“ They are where they belong — with Mr. Theodore Burnett. I took them to him the moment I was aware of the fact that they were in my possession. ”

“ Mr. Theodore Burnett! Then was he the man who came home with you, the one who stopped three doors up? ”

“ Yes, that was Mr. Theodore Burnett, the junior member of the firm.”

“ Heavens above! And I took him to be one of your confederates! ”

“ So he is, and we happen to be working on an inside job. It was never my idea to be so secretive about my being a detective, at least so far as Major Simpson was concerned, but the Burnetts were sure he would not know how to cooperate with me and that if a clue was found he would bungle because he is so — so — I might say, old fashioned, though that is hardly the word because the business of detecting crime is as old as crime itself, and what new wrinkles have been discovered do not amount to a row of pins.”

“ There now, it was that kind of talk that made me say you were not a notion counter girl,” said Mrs. Leslie. “ But you will tell Major Simpson now, surely.”

“ No, not yet! I am afraid he would bungle things. Mr. Burnett and I have decided to keep him in the dark as to my business until the real thieves are caught.”

“Of course if you catch the shoplifters you want the glory of it and if you took him in on it he might get half,” said Mrs. Leslie. “That’s human nature.”

“I don’t care a snap for the glory,” laughed Josie. “It may be human nature, but it is not mine and it was not my father’s. I know you think this will sound smug, but honestly and truly the doing of the work is what interests me and anybody who wants to can walk off with the laurel wreath. Of course the laborer is worthy of his hire and I want the hard cash for delivering the goods. Not that I do the work for money either — that is, I don’t think about the money end of it while I am doing it. After it is all over it is rather pleasant to deposit a fat check in the bank.”

“Yes, I reckon it is, and it takes money to dress as you do,” said Mrs. Leslie.

“As I do?” laughed Josie. “Why, Mrs. Leslie, I don’t believe there is a girl at Burnett & Burnett’s so simply dressed as I am.”

“Simply but elegantly!” insisted Mrs. Leslie. “I know dress goods when I see it — and shoes — there is nothing simple about your shoes.”

“Well, you are right, my dear lady. I do get

good material for my frocks and I do wear good shoes. By the way, what did Major Simpson think of my shoes? ”

“ Your shoes! ” and Mrs. Leslie blushed furiously. “ What do you mean, Josie? But I’m not going to lie about it. The Major did go in your room, but he made me feel it was in the cause of the upholding of the law that I should take him there. He did not meddle with anything however — except — ”

“ Except my little book in the top drawer,” teased Josie.

“ Yes— ” faltered the much embarrassed hostess, “ but how did you know that? ”

“ I knew it in the first place because the book was not quite in the corner and the back turned in instead of out. But if I had not known it already this would have been proof that someone had been in my drawer.” Josie produced the broken cuff link.

“ Oh, my dear, I am so mortified that I let that bigoted old man make such a fool of me,” wailed Mrs. Leslie. “ He doesn’t know the first thing about the detective business, either. And I thought he was so clever. You see he is the first one I ever knew and he talked so knowingly. The

idea of his leaving a cuff link in the drawer! And to think of his spending all this time tracking down a detective! Anybody could see with half an eye that you are as honest as the day is long. Josie, I am going to do anything you tell me to keep your identity concealed from old Major Simpson. I don't care if he does belong to one of the most respectable families in our county, with his ancestral home right next to mine — and I don't care if he did give me a pink parasol when I was a little girl. He is a poor detective and that is what I am interested in."

"That's the way to talk," said Josie, and the girls laughed so merrily that Mrs. Leslie joined in. "But what line of subterfuge are we to decide on? It is really very important to keep the poor man fooled for a few days yet."

"I'll phone him again and tell him the water-melons are to be with me for sometime — I mean lemons — and he need have no fear of losing them."

CHAPTER XII

A BOARDING HOUSE HERO

When Major Simpson received the frantic message from Mrs. Leslie informing him the watermelons had come, for a moment he stood aghast, not knowing at all what she meant. Slowly a wary smile overspread his rotund countenance and he exclaimed:

“By golly! There’s a woman for you! I’ll bet my gold-headed cane that somebody had caught on to the lemons and she realized I would have intelligence enough to grasp her meaning if she substituted watermelons. Of course—of course—picnics back in the grove behind the church—ice cold watermelons—ice cold lemonade. Even had she said fried chicken I should have been wise. Well, well! I must not neglect my digestion for this little shoplifter. Since she is safe in the hands of my good friend Polly Bainbridge I can eat my dinner in peace. I wonder whether or not the stolen goods are still on the wretch. I fancy not, but once we get our clutches

on her she will divulge where she has hidden the loot.”

Major Simpson was star boarder in the very select house run by Mrs. Celeste White. The place was called “Maison Blanche”. Mrs. White seemed to think that her name Celeste gave her sufficient reason for assuming a French air. For that reason at Maison Blanche the bill of fare was always the menu. The baking dishes were casseroles, the napkins, serviettes. She made desperate efforts to have old Aunt Maria called the chef but that worthy person objected.

“ No’m! I ain’t no shelf an’ I ain’t gonter be laid on none fer many a day yit. I’m a plain cook as fer as what you call me is consarned but I’m plain an’ fancy as fer as cookin’ is consarned. An’ what I cook air a gonter be called by the right name s’long as it air in my kitchen. When it gits as fer as the precinct of the butler’s pantry it kin begin ter change its name an’ not befo’. I cooks maccaroni an’ cheese in a bakin’ dish but Miss White she make a pass over it an’ by the time the boa’ders gits settled in they seats my maccaroni an’ cheese air fergetti O’ Gratty Ann. I don’t know who this here Gratty Ann is but she sho mus’ a been a great one fer the eatin’s since

she got so many things named after her. They even got pertatters named her name only Miss White, she calls 'em pums. This Gratty Ann an' that there Cassy Roll got they patent hitched on ter mos' eve'y thing these days. In ol' times Sally Lum an' Brown Betty wa' the onlies oomans what got they names in the cook book an' now them two has ter take a back seat. The times air sho quare. Miss White she don't even let cawfy be plain cawfy, that is when they dishes it up in them little doll baby 'cups, but she got ter name it after some low flung pusson called Demmy Task. I don't know who Demmy Task is but she mus' be a stingy one."

In the kitchen Aunt Maria ruled supreme, while in the parlor Major Simpson was monarch of all he surveyed — from the great Mrs. Celeste White herself down to the humble little Miss Willie Watts who rented Mrs. White's attic room which she pleased to call a studio. Here Miss Willie made crayon portraits of the living and the dead for a living, and for pleasure she painted fancy pictures illustrating striking bits in mythology as well as her favorite songs. These pictures painted merely for the love of what the poor little woman called "her art" she never sold, because

nobody ever bought them. But she was very generous with them at Christmas and on birthdays and weddings. According to Miss Willie Watts everything must be decorated—no space go to waste. Art abhorred a bare space as much as Nature did a vacuum.

Major Simpson was the recipient of several of Miss Willie's efforts. "The Lovers' Tryst," painted in a wooden mixing bowl, was touching indeed. Of course the poor man never did know what he was expected to do with a wooden bowl so he did nothing with it—just had it around. The small rolling pin tastefully decorated in new born cupids and suspended by silken cords and tassels attached to the handles, he guessed was meant for a cravat holder and so the vivid pink cupids peeped out from behind the old gentleman's sober ties, constantly reminding him that the fool that the cynics tell us is born every minute may also be a lover.

On this evening Major Simpson was in his glory. The paying lady guests at Maison Blanche were gathered together in the parlor, listening in wrapt admiration while the star boarder recounted with becoming modesty the almost superhuman intelligence he had exercised in tracking down the

desperate criminal, little Josie O'Gorman. Of course he named no names for fear that by some means the terrible truth might be conveyed to his victim and she might escape.

“How thrilling!” trilled a sweet young thing of some forty summers. “Oh, Major, you are wonderfully clever! I wish I might see you work. How will you proceed now? Will you swear out a warrant and go and arrest the wicked creature?”

“No, no, not yet! It is most important to round up all of the girl's confederates. In the mean time she is safe in the apartment of my friend, the widow from my county — ”

“A widow!” exclaimed Miss Willie Watts. “So she is a widow?”

Miss Willie was a contented little woman and envied no woman anything except a dead husband. In her heart she had always longed to be a widow. Her imagination could not picture for her a live husband but she could easily see herself in a widow's ruche with a long crepe veil. Her imagination even carved a name on the tombstone marking the grave over which she mourned so piteously. It was not always the same name, for Miss Willie allowed herself

to be fickle in regard to her imaginary dead husbands; but for many months now she had thought how blissful it would be to be called the Widow Simpson and how handsome the name Major Sylvester Simpson would look on an imposing marble shaft—"beloved husband of Willie Watts"—or should it be Wilhelmina? Willie would look so boyish on a tombstone.

Had Major Simpson realized the little artist was regarding him in "that bony light" no doubt he would have refused to let his cravats hang over the cupid covered rolling pin, but he merely counted her as one of the many lovely ladies who did him homage at the Maison Blanche, listening to his stories and applauding his cleverness.

"Burnett & Burnett could hardly get along without you," murmured Miss Willie, thinking of herself as cruel even to imagine the efficient righthand man of the department store as carved on a tombstone.

"Well, they won't have to. I could retire tomorrow if I chose, but the work of a detective is so engrossing that once one has engaged in it, it is impossible to relinquish it."

“ Have you always been one? ” asked the sweet young thing.

“ Not officially — but at heart, always.”

“ I wonder you did not get in Government Secret Service. You would have been invaluable,” cooed one of the ladies.

“ Ahem! Yes, but Burnett & Burnett needed me.”

“ Of course — but how noble of you to stay in Wakely when the logical place for you to be was Washington,” declared Miss Willie. Then she asked vaguely: “ Do they bury Secret Service agents in Arlington? ” Nobody knew, so nobody answered, and Miss Willie blushed furiously, fearing that Major Simpson might guess the foolish thing that was in her mind when she asked the seemingly inconsequent question. Miss Willie had a way of breaking into a conversation following her own train of thought rather than the subject under discussion, and the guests at Maison Blanche were accustomed to her peculiarity and paid little attention to it. One solemn looking old lady, who said little but missed nothing, gave a deep gurgling chuckle. This old lady’s name was Mrs. Trescott. She had occupied a small back bedroom at Mrs. Celeste White’s for as many

years as Major Simpson had occupied the large front one.

Mrs. Trescott's chuckle was fortunately drowned by the dinner gong. The boarders trooped in and fell on the *purree de pois* with the same gusto they would have employed had it been called plain pea soup. As soon as the first pangs of hunger were satisfied the conversation of the parlor was resumed.

"But, Major Simpson, you haven't told us what this naughty girl looks like," said one of the ladies. "Of course she is beautiful and charming and very chic."

"No, I don't think she is any of these things," said the Major. "She is quite insignificant looking and her clothes are not of the latest style, though they are of very rich material. Her shoes are quite good and she is intellectual and well educated; speaks French with a good accent and reads Greek. Those highbrow crooks are the worst of all and the hardest to catch."

"*Boeuf a la mode* to-day," said Mrs. White by way of informing the assembled company that French with an accent was eaten at her table if not spoken. And one of the young men at the far end of the room said in a hoarse whisper:

“That means biled beef.” But Mrs. Celeste White never heard anything she did not want to hear.

There were three persons at *Maison Blanche* that might have been called thorns in the flesh or flies in the amber. They were two frivolous young men and one young woman who utterly refused to play the game of its being a French *pension* and who openly made game of Major Simpson, calling him Sherlocko and asking him where Dr. Watsonia was. They had all their fun to themselves, however, as the other inmates loved to look upon their dinner as *table d’hôte* and were sure that Major Simpson in flesh and blood was much cleverer than Conan Doyle’s fictitious detective. Mrs. Trescott was the only person who derived any amusement from the bad manners of the three young persons and she could not help giving her famous gurgling chuckle when any of their witty remarks touched her risibles.

“Did you say pois meant cat?” one of the men asked.

“No, peas! Why?” from the girl.

“Oh, I thought it must mean cat or maybe kitten because it’s called purry and it sure does

purr as it is taken in out of the cold. Listen!”

Everybody involuntarily stopped eating and listened except one deaf old lady who was drinking her pea soup with such gusto that the noise she made did sound ridiculously like the purring of a cat.

Mrs. Trescott chuckled and the three naughty ones giggled.

“Oh, Mrs. White, you should hear the thrilling things Major Simpson has been telling us about a wicked shoplifter at Burnett & Burnett’s,” said one of the ladies as the soup dishes were removed and there was a lull in the business of eating.

“Shoplifter?” asked one of the young men known as Jimmy Blaine. Jimmy was a cub reporter on a morning paper and his life was lived with his ear cocked for news. “Do tell us about it Sher — Major Simpson.”

The Major, forgetting all about Jimmy’s profession and glad of the chance to entertain a new audience, one that had heretofore been a scoffing one, plunged again into the tale of how he had run down Josie O’Gorman to her lair. He waxed eloquent over the account of Mrs. Leslie and her doughnuts and coffee, even mentioning

the pink parasol he had given that lady in her childhood.

“And now all we have to do is round up the whole gang through this slip of a girl. She thinks she is clever but she is no match for Sylvester Simpson.” The Major sat back and beamed on his listeners, visibly swelling with pride.

“Hope he don’t bust on me,” Jimmy’s side partner, Kit Williams, whispered to the naughty young woman who was always ready to giggle.

“Tell us the name of this awful young person,” begged Jimmy.

“Oh no, young man! When you get to be as old as I am and as experienced you will realize that one mustn’t tell names and tales too.”

At this juncture Aunt Maria poked her head in the dining room door and announced:

“Miss Celeste, Major Simpson’s phone air a ringin’ lak sompen wa’ on fiah. I’d go up an’ answer it myse’f if it would do any good—but when folks wants Major Simpson they wants him an’ I reckon they couldn’t use no substerchute.”

“Ah, no doubt a development!” said the Major as he hurried to his room to quiet the persistent ringing of the telephone bell.

He returned before the next course of the table d'hôte was served. His genial pink face was beaming and like Kilmansegg, father of the immortal one of the golden leg:

“ Seem'd washing his hands with invisible
soap

In imperceptible water.”

“ Just as I said — a development,” he declared. “ It was Mr. Theodore Burnett on the telephone. He informs me that the articles, purloined from his establishment this forenoon, have been returned.”

“ Oh, how thrilling! Did he say by whom? ” asked the coy one.

“ That was not necessary. I did not even ask him who returned them. I knew.”

CHAPTER XIII

JIMMY BLAINE GETS A SCOOP

There were two morning newspapers in Wake-ly; one pink and one yellow. On week mornings half of the town read the pink journal and the other half the yellow one. On Sunday mornings the whole town read both. Jimmy Blaine worked for the yellow one.

It was Jimmy Blaine's regular business to go out on any consignment the powers that be might send him. It was his irregular business to make news if there was no news, thereby adding to his fame and bulging out his weekly pay envelope. While the Major was telling his tale Mrs. Trescott was the only one to notice how shiny Jimmy's eyes were and how quick and almost feverish was his breathing. Before the last course was served Jimmy jumped from his seat.

“ ‘ S’cuse me, but I must be a-hustling. No, Miss Celeste, no *souffle aux pruneaux* for me this evening,” in answer to the hostess’s proffer of

prune whip. "S'long everybody! See you in the morning." Jimmy was gone.

Several chuckles bubbled up from the depths of Mrs. Trescott's satin bodice. That evening, when Mrs. Trescott made her usual weekly pilgrimage to the kitchen to speak to Aunt Maria and slip her the customary Saturday night tip she gave her an extra five cents, commissioning her to purchase the Sunday morning yellow journal for her.

"Moughty 'stravagant Mis' Trescott when they's allus pufectly good Sunday papers a goin' ter waste 'roun' here. All you is got ter do is jes' wait a while. Major Simpson has one, an Miss Celeste has one an' Mr. Jimmy Blaine is mo'n apt ter have two or three. I allus say 'taint no trouble ter start Monday mornin' fiah at this here Mason Bluemange. If you want ter save yo' nickel I'll see that you gits the very fust paper that anybody gits through with."

"That's very kind, Maria, but I want one all to myself tomorrow morning, and want it before anybody has pawed over it and mixed it up. I have an idea there will be something of especial interest to me."

Mrs. Trescott was right. Jimmy Blaine had not foregone the pleasures of prune whip for

nothing. He had rushed pell mell to the office and frantically pounded out on an extra type writer the whole story of Major Simpson and the shoplifter. He had named no names, thereby carefully sidestepping any chance for a libel suit, but he had so accurately described Burnett & Burnett's that the whole of Wakely could but guess the department store mentioned in the story. The stage setting was realistic, the local color perfect, but the young journalist had let his fancy run riot where description of characters were concerned.

Mrs. Trescott received her private Sunday morning newspaper, literally damp from the press. Aunt Maria was what she called "an early stirrer", and the first newsboy that shouted his wares in the neighborhood of Maison Blanche was nabbed and made to deliver by the intrepid old cook, who patiently climbed the two flights of steps to Mrs. Trescott's third-floor-back hall bedroom and poked the paper in her door.

"Here you am, Mis Trescott, an' a cup er caw-fy ter tide you over come brekfus time. You mus' be 'spectin' of some funeral notice ter make you so besirous of a private paper."

Aunt Maria well knew that Mrs. Trescott had

to watch her pennies very closely and the extravagance of five cents spent for first peep at a newspaper could mean little short of a death and a funeral.

“ Perhaps! ” chuckled the lady, “ but I’ll come read the news to you after while, Maria. I am more than obliged to you for your kindness. No doubt the coffee will help me bear up,” and then the old lady gave another deep soul-satisfying gurgle as she unfolded the damp newspaper and ran her eyes eagerly over the news columns.

There it was, just as she knew it would be, but better, so much better!

“ Oh, the rascal, the young rascal! He has made a romance of that old fool Major’s finding the widow from his own part of the country and her helping him to track the criminal. He even has in the doughnuts and coffee and the pink parasol.”

It might be said that Mrs. Trescott stopped chuckling and chortled. What difference did it make if one was poor and old and condemned to spend ones days in a third-floor-back hall bedroom if one had a sense of humor equal to Mrs. Trescott’s. Her humor was the type that needed no second person with whom to enjoy the ridic-

lousnesses of life. Her solemn countenance gave no inkling to the outside world of the riot of fun going on within. The gurgling laughter that sought an outlet was to the uninitiated no more mirthful than the bubble of air arising from an old submerged mud turtle, appearing on the surface of the water and breaking.

“ I’d like to hear what the Burnetts have to say this morning,” she gasped. “ Oh, that will be unprintable I am sure, but our Jimmy Blaine could make copy of it nevertheless. And the little shoplifter — no doubt she is happy at being put in the paper as beautiful beyond compare, with a dark mysterious past that tugs against her better nature — but the better nature prevails and she returns the stolen goods. I wonder Jimmy did not announce an engagement between her and Mr. Theodore Burnett. I think I’ll suggest it to him. A suggestion is all that is necessary to our Jimmy. Oh, Jimmy, Jimmy! ”

In the mean time Jimmy was sleeping the sleep of a cub reporter happy over a scoop and the fact that he had cleared a neat little sum on the extra columns of space he had filled so successfully. Kit Williams, his friend and room mate, had seized on the early edition Jimmie had brought home

with him and his mirth was loud and lusty over what Jimmy had done to the Major.

“Gee. Ain’t he the kid?” he cried. “I could kiss him where he sleeps if he wasn’t so unshaved.”

“You try it,” muttered Jimmy sleepily, having come to life just enough to hear Kit’s ravings. “You try it and you’ll never shave again.” He then turned over and pulled the covers over his tousled head, hoping to be lost to the world until dinner time, breakfast offering no inducements to one who had been up all night making news for the greedy public.

Miss Willie Watts was greatly excited over the article. It seemed to her very astonishing that the “paper” should know so much about something that had only just happened. At first she did not connect Jimmy Blaine with the story but when she did all she could say was:

“But how did he know so much about the appearance of the poor wicked shoplifter when Major Simpson did not tell him any more than he did me? And how did he know the widow was handsome and dashing, the one who made the doughnuts and coffee? Major Simpson never said so in so many words. Ah me! All widows

are handsome and dashing, it seems. I wonder if this won't make the poor Major sick. I hope he won't die — ” and then she began dreaming of his tombstone and how it would look:

“ Major Sylvester Simpson, beloved husband of Wilhelmina — ” etc.

Mrs. Celeste White read the story and thought Jimmy was pretty clever but wished he had mentioned that the doughty hero lived at Maison Blanche.

“ A very good chance for some free advertising and I might just as well have had it,” she grumbled. “ Young people seem never to think of such things.”

The Major read the whole paper before he came to the part of the magazine section which carried his story. It was his custom to have breakfast in his room on Sunday morning so that he might take his ease before making the elaborate toilet he felt to be necessary for one whose duty and pleasure it was to pass the plate in church.

“ What's this? What's this? ” he cried, glaring excitedly at Jimmy's lurid headlines. “ Story of Seductive Shoplifter — dashing widow — doughnuts and coffee — pink parasol — reunited

after years of sad separation — Ahem — handsome detective — Tracked to her lair shop girl returns purloined articles! All will be forgiven and beautiful maiden will continue her labor at large department store so popular in the city of Wakely. Of course her identity will remain a secret — no person but the wily detective and the generous employer being aware of her identity.” The poor man groaned aloud and let his second cup of coffee get chilled.

“Who, who can have done this? Ah — that wretched Jimmy Blaine! I forgot he was connected with the press. This vile sheet has always disgusted me. I never intend to read it again,” and then the old gentleman settled himself to con every word of Jimmy’s scoop. He found it rather pleasant to be written up as handsome and gallant, and the romance between himself and the Mrs. Leslie hinted at in the article was on the whole quite gratifying.

“But the Burnett’s! What will they think?” While no names were mentioned there could be little doubt of the identity of the persons in the story.

“Let them think what they choose,” was Major Simpson’s final decision. “It is not for me, Syl-

vester Simpson, to account to the young Burnett's for my method of tracking criminals." And then he proceeded to justify himself for having talked too freely before a cub reporter and even persuaded himself that the publicity given the shoplifting episode was a stroke of finesse that only a master mind, such as his, would have been capable of originating.

"I can manage Charles," he said to himself, "but I am not so sure of Theodore. He is an opinionated youngster."

In the mean time the "opinionated youngster" was doubled up with laughter over the magazine section of the Sunday paper.

"Just when we thought we could put our hands on the criminals! Oh, Major Simpson, Major Simpson, what a legacy our father and grandfather left us in your portly person! And what will the little O'Gorman say to this?"

What the little O'Gorman thought we may never know, but what she said was:

"Oh, me, oh, my! As my father used to say; 'The best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft alee.'"

She then betook herself to the quiet and peace of her own little bedroom, there to work out a

plan and incidentally to read a few pages in her book of books, hoping her clever father might have left some words of wisdom bearing more directly on misplaced publicity than on the schemes of mice and men.

Mrs. Leslie's indignation knew no bounds when she read what the newspaper said about her.

"Dashing widow indeed! I never dashed in my life."

"And certainly you never widdled," said Mary, trying not to laugh. "But, dearest, you should be proud that your coffee and doughnuts got into print, although anonymously. After all, nobody will know whose they were unless you tell them."

"You may be sure I'll not do that. But one thing I am going to tell if I have to do it with my dying breath: I shall tell Sylvester Simpson that he is a pompous old idiot."

CHAPTER XIV

THE QUARREL NEXT DOOR

Josie was right; the song of the frogs meant spring was on the way — in the air — in the ground — in one's bones. The Leslie's apartment was hot, hot to suffocation. The janitor, following in the footsteps of most janitors, had made up an extra hot fire in the furnace because it was Sunday and because it was a warm Sunday. When Josie sought the quiet of her own room to escape the reiterated wailings of Mrs. Leslie and to read her precious little book, she found the atmosphere oppressively heavy. To escape it she raised her window and leaned far out, drinking deep of the soft spring air. The little back yard was showing signs of coming to life. A brave little daffodil had poked a green nose up through the black earth and a foolish peach tree actually had a few precocious buds on one of its slender branches.

“ They'll be nipped and deserve to be,” thought Josie. “ But I reckon they can't help it any more

than I can resist almost falling out of the window in search of air.”

Someone else was evidently of the same mind, as a window next to the one from which Josie was leaning was raised with some vehemence and an impatient voice, strangely familiar to Josie, exclaimed:

“Gee, but it’s hot in this hole! I hate to think of summer’s coming.”

“And I — ah, how I long for warmth — ” drawled a woman’s voice with a foreign accent.

Josie decided it was the Kambourians—mother and son. Then a goodnatured growl from the interior of the room gave evidence that Papa Kambourian was not far off.

“*Nom de Dieu* — close the window, Roy! Do not you understand that Mamma and I have ‘air enough during the week days to last us over the blessed Sabbath. That is the worst of these United States and all who happen to be born here as were you, *mon bon enfant* — air always air!”

“And I! How about me being shut up in a shop all week with a bunch of silly girls, working like a dog — and when I do pull off a deal to have Mamma fall down on her part? I can’t get over it — losing the things.”

“ Now, now, boy! ” and the goodnatured growl bordered on anger. “ Let Mamma be! It was unavoidable. Has she not already wept oceans of tears? What are a few yards of wretched lace and a bit bauble of a gold bag to poor Mamma’s feelings? Let be, *mon fils*, and try again. A few more hauls and we will have enough to set up a small shop in the great metropolis.”

“ Not for me! I’m through I tell you — through for good and all. I’m sick of the whole wretched business. You and Mamma can keep on being foreigners all you want but I’m an American boy — almost a man — and I want to pull loose. I could make as much money walking straight as I do crooked.” His voice rose angrily and Josie felt that the boy was on the verge of tears in spite of his assertion that he was almost a man.

“ Shut the window! ” roared the father. “ Such foolish babble is enough to start the whole neighborhood talking! ”

“ Now, now! ” soothed the woman’s voice. “ Don’t you and Papa quarrel. I know my little Roy will not what you call pull out yet and leave poor Mamma before she gets enough pretty things to start a little *boutique*. Shut the window

like a gentle boy because the air may make Papa sick."

"How can air make one sick who sits all day on a sidewalk?"

"And now you reproach poor Papa and Mama because they sit all day and sell the pencils and shoe strings and paperrs," whined the woman, though it was easy to grasp that the whine in her voice was pure burlesque. "Was I made for such a life? No, I tell you, nevaire!"

At this juncture the window was closed with a vigorous slam and the eavesdropper heard no more. She had heard quite enough however to set her steady little heart a thumping.

"I am almost as big an idiot as my worthy brother in arms, Major Simpson," Josie took herself to task. "Anybody with a grain of sense would have known all along what I had to open a window to find out. Thank goodness for the over zealous janitor. I'll give him a generous tip tomorrow. But mercy on us, how carefully I must go now. I can hardly trust myself not to burst in on the Leslies and tell them the whole thing. One thing I know, I must call in help from the police department, as much as I hate to get any clumsy folks mixed up in this. I know what

I'll do — ” She made a feverish dive for her hat and jacket, and grabbing up her gloves rushed through the living room, saying in passing:

“ Expect me back when you see me but know that I am not running off for more than an hour or so.”

“ There now! ” gasped Mrs. Leslie. “ What a strange girl she is after all. What do you think is the matter, Mary? ”

“ I think she has a clue and is following it up. All I am wondering is where she got it in such a short time and if she will tell us all about it later on. It is certainly interesting to have a person like Josie to rent a room from us, isn't it Mother?”

“ I should say so; but I wish she wouldn't be so sudden,” sighed Mrs. Leslie. “ I think she ought to tell me what her clue is because I am sure I could help her.”

Mary smiled. She was not so sure. Up to the present her mother had been more of a hindrance than a help to their little lodger. As for suddenness; nobody could have been more sudden than that lady in accepting without question the opinion of old Major Simpson merely because he had come from her county and had presented

her with a pink parasol when she was quite a tiny girl.

To a clever girl like Josie, it was an easy matter to find out the name of the reporter on the yellow journal who had spread himself so lavishly on the shoplifting story. First to the newspaper office where, it being a morning paper, the business of the day had not begun. The office was open, however, and a janitor was lazily sweeping the floor and grumbling because the one who took care of a daily newspaper office had no Sunday to speak of. The man at a desk agreed with him as did also the telephone girl whose business it was to handle the private switchboard.

“May I speak with the city editor?” Josie asked meekly.

“Not in yet!” growled the man at the desk. “Anything I can do?”

“Oh, please, if you will be so kind—I want the name and address of the reporter who had the shoplifting story in the paper this morning.”

“Whatcher want with it? It’s against the policy of the paper to divulge names and addresses. The management holds itself responsible for all stories published in its columns and the management has not come down yet.”

“ I merely wanted to give the man a chance on another scoop, but since you are evidently not desirous of scoops I’ll look up the other paper.”

“ How’s that? Scoop? Give it to me! I’ll get hold of Jimmy Blaine in a minute. The truth of the matter is, young lady, I am the management but it’s policy to keep it dark when anybody is on the war path. I was afraid you were one of the wronged ladies in Jimmy’s story — but I might have known you weren’t.”

“ Well, if you can get hold of this Jimmy I’d be very much obliged.”

“ What is the nature of your story? Anything like the one this morning? ”

“ No, this one is a true story. There is mighty little that is true in the scoop of the morning except perhaps the pink parasol and the doughnuts. Would it be against the policy of the paper for you to divulge just what part of the management you are? ”

“ Ahem! I am part owner and managing editor.”

“ Then you’ll do, but please get this Jimmy here as fast as you can so I can tell the tale to both of you at once and save time and breath.”

Jimmy Blaine was forced to uncover his head and listen to his room mate.

“Boss wants you and wants you in a hurry. He says never mind dolling up, but just come along. He’s on the phone now and Miss Celeste says it must be important because he sounds so brisk.” Thus spake Kit Williams, going through the operation on sodden Jimmy known as “cold pigging”, that is, applying a wet sponge to a sleeper’s face.

“Don’t hide! Get up and go to the phone,” insisted Kit as Jimmy snuggled down in the bed clothes and again covered his tousled head.

“Aw gee! Have a heart, cantcher? Don’t go joking me, Kit, that’s a good boy.”

“Well then, lose your job if you want to. What’s it to me? You blooming idiot, didn’t you hear me say that the boss himself is hollerin’ for you. I reckon he’s got a mouthfull to say about that lurid tale you pulled off in this morning’s paper.”

“He saw it before it went in,” growled Jimmy. “If there is any trouble it is up to him. Ain’t he the management?”

“I thought that would wake you up. Now get up and put on your dressing gown—here it is—here are your slippers. Never mind your bou-doir cap, just slip along to the phone.”

Jimmy meekly obeyed. There was no use in grumbling when one's boss was on the line.

“Hello!” he said in a voice as sweet as honey.

“Yes, sir! Yes, sir! Be right down. Don't let her get away.”

“Breakfast? No sir! What's breakfast! Never eat on Sunday, that is, breakfast. Be down in a jiffy.”

It was a wide awake Jimmy who, after turning on a cold shower, tore back to his room and began to throw on his clothes like a lightning change vaudeville artist.

“So long, Kit, old fellow. Something big is up but I don't know what. It's got something to do with Sherlocko Simpson, I think, but I'll see you later,” and the youngster was out on the street and running for a trolley in less time than it would have taken the fire department to answer an alarm.

CHAPTER XV

JOSIE SETS A TRAP

Jimmy Blaine did not now just what he was expecting but he knew it was not a quiet, business-like young person like Josie who showed no shyness and at the same time no brazenness, but with the utmost composure stated the case and put it up to the management whether or not it was worth while to pursue the scoop unearthed by the cub reporter. As soon as Jimmy breezed in, all on fire for more sensational news, Mr. Cox introduced him to the visitor. Josie gave him a boyish handshake and then plunged into the matter in hand.

“In the first place I am a detective, Josie O’Gorman from Washington and late of Dorfield. My father — ”

“Not the O’Gorman!” from Mr. Cox.

“Yes,” beamed Josie. “I am here with Burnett & Burnett to catch the shoplifters that have been busy lately.”

Jimmy surreptitiously produced a pencil and endeavored to get hold of a linen cuff, but Josie stopped him:

“ Please, Mr. Blaine, none of this is for publication as yet. You can get the whole story in good time and it will be a good one I am sure. I have come to the newspaper for help because in my experience the live wires are on newspapers and not on the police force. I cannot say for sure that the police of Wakely would bungle, but I can say that the police of Dorfield would and have. My father believed in the press as a great detective power and I have had more help from a young newspaper man in Dorfield than all the police; in spite of the fact that Chief Lonsdale of Dorfield is my very dear friend. But this young Dulaney — ”

“ Not Bob Dulaney of the — th Regiment? ” cried Jimmy.

“ Yes — Bob Dulaney! ”

“ Gee! This is great! Shake again! ” cried Jimmy. “ I’ve spent many a night lying in the mud near Bob, over there.”

“ Then you now Danny Dexter, too? ”

“ Know him? Know him like a book! Why Danny was my Father Confessor. Many a time

he's told me what's what. You see, I was the kid of the regiment and some of the fellows seemed to think it was up to them to make me walk chalk. I walked it all right."

"We've no doubt you did," twinkled Mr. Cox.

"Well, Danny Dexter married my best friend; but that's another story and we'd better get back to business. Please let me say that I'm glad I came to the newspaper for cooperation as I'm pretty sure a friend of Bob Dulaney and Danny Dexter is going to be on the job and deliver the goods," said Josie.

Jimmy Blaine grinned happily, proud that his boss should hear him praised through his friends.

Josie plunged into a recital of the Kambourians and how she had been mystified by them from the moment she saw them on the street that first Sunday in Wakely. She told of the baffling likeness the youth had to someone she had seen before; of her finding board in the same apartment house with them, by chance as it were; of Miss Mary Leslie's encounter with a beggar in the hallway and of her identification of this beggar as the man whose habit it was to sit all day at the front entrance of Burnett & Burnett's. She then

touched on Major Simpson's laughable mistake concerning her own character.

“ He thinks I am the shoplifter and has had me under surveillance ever since I have been employed by his firm. I only grasped this fact yesterday. I knew he was following me around but I was conceited enough to fancy it was my methods that interested him. I thought maybe he knew I was my father's daughter and was trying to learn something.”

Jimmy gasped:

“ Then you are the one he thinks he has trapped.”

“ The same! Thank you for making me such an irresistible vamp.”

“ What! What! Is your story not true?” Mr. Cox looked both alarmed and irritated.

“ It's practically what old Simpson told right out at the boarding house table. Of course I kind of — er — er — embellished it a little, but the story is almost as he gave it — doughnuts and coffee and all.”

“ It is what Major Simpson thinks is true, but suppose I go on with my tale. I am sure Mr. Blaine wrote the matter up quite correctly according to newspaper etiquette — certainly there is no

handle for legal trouble," soothed Josie. "If I don't mind being called a beautiful criminal I am sure Mrs. Leslie should not mind being published as a fascinating widow. Anyhow, no names were used, so what's the difference?"

"Perhaps you are right," said Mr. Cox, smoothing out his troubled brow. "Pray proceed. Your story is most interesting."

"Please tell us — did you return the goods to Mr. Burnett?" asked Jimmy.

Then Josie told of the twisted newspaper and her discovery of the lace and gold mesh bag and her taking the articles to Mr. Burnett. She also told of having tried to locate the haughty Miss Fauntleroy.

"And now — to sum up: Miss Fauntleroy is a fake and wishes to conceal her address. The newspaper I bought from the old woman who sits at the rear entrance of Burnett & Burnett's had passed through the hands of Miss Fauntleroy and she put the stolen goods in the paper and twisted it up and returned it to the old woman."

"Golly!" was all Jimmy could say. "And this Miss Fauntleroy?"

"It came to me all of a heap this very day that it was she to whom the young Kambourian had

the haunting likeness. I had seen her in the store and been rather interested in her because she seemed different from the other employees. She is evidently the daughter of the house and the old beggar is none other than the mother, Madame Kambourian. The father begs at the front door, the mother at the back, and the daughter takes what suits her fancy and deposits it now with Mamma and now with Papa."

"But you said this Madame Kambourian was handsome," objected Mr. Cox. "Handsome and not at all old—hardly old enough to be the mother of the youth."

"Yes, but age is easier to assume than youth. She had on a clever make-up. I wonder how much she takes in each day, selling papers and never having the change." Then Josie proceeded to tell all that she had overheard through the open window, and how this was made possible because of the janitor's having been too lavish with the owner's coal.

"Now we must round up the whole bunch. The boy is mixed up in it somehow, though he is still a mystery to me. I could not gather just exactly what he does to increase the family income but I am sure it is something of which he is not

proud. I feel rather sorry for the boy because I am sure he'd like to cut the whole bunch and be honest. The entire family is interesting to me. The man and woman seem so fond of each other and so considerate. I'll give you my word they are much more loving than many married couples one sees."

"You have not seen this Miss Fauntleroy there, have you?" asked Mr. Cox. "You are not really sure that she belongs there."

"Not so sure that I could swear to it in a court of justice, but so sure that I could safely say I'd eat my hat if she is not," laughed Josie. "I think she must be twin sister to this boy. I don't want to brag, but when I get a hunch like this it is apt to be right."

"Well then, let's proceed on the assumption that Miss Fauntleroy is in reality Miss Kambourian. What next?"

"Next we must plan a campaign of watchful waiting. I will take charge of the interior of Burnett & Burnett's, keeping a never closing eye on Miss Fauntleroy. I must have help to look after the beggar at the front and the one at the back as well as the Kambourian apartment, both front and back."

After much thought and discussion Mr. Cox and Josie, with the alert intelligence of Jimmy Blaine to advise with them, decided the thing was too big not to call in the assistance of the police. The blue coats might bungle, but at least they could be set to watch the alley behind the apartment house and report anything out of the way.

“ We’ve got a new chief here who is not so hide bound as the old one was; in fact, he is very down-to-date in his methods. I am sure he will cooperate with us. Call him up, Jimmy, and see if he is at his office. Sunday is no more of a holiday to the police than to newspaper men.”

The chief proved to be having a holiday in spite of its being Sunday, but an alert young sergeant answered the call and even expressed himself as willing to come to the newspaper office instead of having the newspaper office come to him. The tale was quickly told. Sergeant Tanner agreed with Josie on the plan of procedure.

“ Who am I, anyhow, to take issue with the daughter of the great O’Gorman? I reckon you are a chip off the old block, Miss, because if you had not been you never would have caught that Markle bunch. We know all about that here in

Wakely. We know how you tracked down that chap in Atlanta, too, the one who had put his step-sister-in-law in a bug house and was planning to marry her and cop the fortune. We know about the kidnapping case in Louisville, also. You see we aren't named Wakely for nothing. Anyhow we are awake enough to keep up with the detective news."

Josie could not help being flattered by Sergeant Tanner's recognition of merit but she merely blushed a little and said:

"It was all luck, absolutely nothing but luck that made me successful in those cases."

"I hope your luck will keep up," said Mr. Cox.

"Of course plain clothes men are what we will need," said the sergeant, "and I think I'll be one of them. Shall I take over the apartment house and the entrances to Burnett & Burnett's?"

"All right!" agreed Jimmy ruefully, "but what'll I be doing? I want to get in on this somewhere."

"You might be an inside man and help me in the shop," said Josie. "Somebody must watch Major Simpson or he'll bungle things."

Sergeant Tanner was much amused over the poor Major and his bungling.

“He’s a terrible dub at detecting. If he had called us in on this shoplifting trouble we might have helped him but old Simp thinks he knows it all and he is as ignorant of the game as a new born babe. Now, Miss O’Gorman, I’ll detail some sharp men to keep an eye on the apartment house to-night and others to look after it every minute of the day to-morrow.”

“And I’ll come in the shop and buy things and even make up to Miss Fauntleroy,” suggested Jimmy.

“Don’t get too much in evidence,” cautioned Josie. “And Sergeant Tanner, be sure to keep a watch over the blind beggar man in front. As for the woman with papers, I have an idea she will not come to work for a day or so, not in the guise of an old woman, at least.”

Josie felt it wise to see Mr. Burnett for a moment before returning home to inform him how matters were progressing and to ask his approval of the move she had made in taking both newspaper men and police force into her confidence.

He approved highly. “Between the two you

will be sure to get help. As for poor old Simpson, I wish he would have a slight indisposition that would keep him away from the store tomorrow. Hasn't he messed things up, though? "

" Perhaps not! Anyhow I am hoping the Kam-bourians are so foreign they don't read the American newspapers. The chances are they know nothing of the publicity given the matter."

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. LESLIE TURNS DETECTIVE

“How can anybody call Monday a blue day?” asked Josie the next morning as Mrs. Leslie served a dainty breakfast to the two girls. “It seems to me to be the most wonderful morning in the whole week. Even wash day holds no terrors for me. It always has been the very best day of all for me, a kind of weekly Easter, a day in which the whole world can start afresh.”

“I’m glad you like it,” said Mrs. Leslie, grimly. “I’ve been brought up to feel differently.” Mrs. Leslie was having a mental and moral reaction from the excitement of the Saturday and Sunday just passed. “Monday was always a serious day with us in the country.”

“But, Mother,” laughed Mary, “you surely do not consider it your religious duty to be blue on Monday.”

“Not exactly religious — but — ”

“Now, Mrs. Leslie, please don’t be too down-

hearted or too busy because I have a task for you that I am sure you can't resist."

"Don't be too sure child, because I am planning to clean beds to-day. The sun is shining and it is a good thing to be beforehand with beds. I can sun the things in the back yard — "

"The very thing!" cried Josie delightedly. "The more you are out in the back yard the better because I do so want you to keep an eye on those Kambourians from the rear. They will not be the least suspicious of a busy housewife engaged in the legitimate search connected with beds and early spring."

Mrs. Leslie's Monday gloom lifted a little. Being a private detective was rather more interesting than the usual humdrum of housekeeping. She promised Josie to keep a sharp lookout on the neighbors.

"You never can tell about foreigners. They are more than apt to be off color," she declared. "If they do anything peculiar while you are away, how must I proceed, Josie? "

"Proceed to call up Burnett & Burnett, phone number, Preston 11, and ask for Mr. Theodore Burnett — take no substitute. Tell him who you are and what is happening. He will do the rest.

The Kambourians may be absent all day but the chances are the woman will not leave the house. The place is even now being watched by detectives. But detectives do not always see everything and I am depending on you to see what they don't see."

"Detectives watching the house now!" cried Mrs. Leslie, "I should say this isn't a blue Monday. I am thrilled indeed to be in the midst of a mystery. Hurry up and get off, girls, so I can get out in the back yard and see what I see."

"Now, Mother, don't overdo it," cautioned Mary.

"Me overdo it!" said Mrs. Leslie, indignantly. "I know exactly how to behave under the circumstances. I am going to run in and out with pillows and blankets and carry out one slat at a time and put mattresses in the windows and let them fall in the yard. I just wish you and Josie could see me."

"I wish we could," laughed Josie. "I am sure you are going to do it splendidly and I am so glad you are interested in it. I just know you will beat all the police in Wakely in helping to bring these crooks to justice."

The girls were hardly out of the house when

Major Simpson was calling Mrs. Leslie on the telephone. The dear lady had not bargained for such a development and it was with difficulty that she commanded her voice to answer the smug old man as she knew he must be answered. She was sorry she had not asked instructions from Josie on how to meet such an emergency, but Major Simpson took matters in his own hands and there was little for her to say but yes and no.

“ And how is my one time neighbor this morning? I hope she is well.”

“ Yes, thank you! ”

“ Has that artful young person left your house? ”

“ Yes! ”

“ And she is going to return to her labors at Burnett & Burnett’s? ”

“ Yes! ”

“ What did she say concerning the article in the paper yesterday? You saw it, did you not? ”

“ Yes! ”

“ It was unfortunate that it should have been published but newspapers are ever on the alert for just such stories; human interest, you know.”

“ Yes! ”

“ Was the artful person angry at the publicity given the matter? ”

“ No! ”

“ What did she say? ”

“ I can't remember exactly, but I think she said ' Gee. ' ”

“ Of course I shall be for dismissing the young person, but Mr. Theodore Burnett evidently thinks otherwise. These young men think they know it all, but I have not dealt with crime all these years without acquiring some knowledge of the youthful criminals. There is no reforming them. Well, Miss Polly, I thank you for cooperating so wonderfully with me in this matter. And you are not angry that the story — er — er — concerning the coffee and doughnuts and er — er — the pink parasol should have leaked out? ”

Mrs. Leslie's: “ Old idiot! ” slipped out before she knew it but Major Simpson's: “ What? What? ” brought her to her senses and she covered her retreat with a cough and smoothed things down by: “ Old intimate friends,” hoping that intimate and idiot might sound more or less alike over a telephone.

“ Of course you will not let this young person remain under your roof,” the Major proceeded.

“ I feel in a measure er — er — responsible for you, Miss Polly, and hope you will allow me to dictate to you to some extent. This young woman, even though Mr. Theodore Burnett is so soft hearted as to keep her in the employ of his firm, is hardly a fit person to associate with you or your — er — er — charming daughter — because I am sure she is charming if she is your daughter. I wish you would promise me that this O’Gorman person will not remain in your home another night.”

Mrs. Leslie hung up the receiver with a click. She was possessed with a fury against the interfering Major that made it impossible to continue the conversation although all that it entailed at her end was a monosyllabic reply. She could well picture him at the other end of the line, indignantly upraiding the telephone operator for having so rudely cut him off. Her bell rang again sharply but she scorned answering it and went about her combined business of bed airing and female sleuthing with added vigor.

“ Miserable old man that he is! Wants me to turn a girl out in the street just because he has made up his mind she is a thief. I don’t feel bad any longer about hoodwinking the old idiot.

He is narrow and mean or he wouldn't ask me to do it."

Josie was right in her guess—Madame Kambourian did not leave the house that day. She, too, found many things to busy her on that bright Monday. Much sorting and airing seemed to be going on in the apartment next to the Leslies. Several times Mrs. Leslie looked up from her labors and saw the pleasant, plump countenance of Mrs. Kambourian peering at her from the open window. Once she nodded and a cheerful "Good mor-r-ning," was the response.

"A nice day for preliminary spring cleaning," ventured Mrs. Leslie.

"Ver-r-ry nice," said the neighbor, placing a silver fox scarf and a sealskin jacket on the window sill where the sun could shine upon them.

"You are not expecting moths this soon are you?" queried Mrs. Leslie.

"Moths? You mean the cr-r-eatures that feed upon the fur-r and wool? Ah, Heaven forbid! I merely sun my things because I love the sun and then it is war-r-m and I may not need them now for many months. I pack them up per-r-haps."

Through the open window Mrs. Leslie could

see a large packing box and a wardrobe trunk.

“Getting ready to leave! It looks to me as though Josie should know this,” she said to herself. Preston 11 was immediately called for by the eager amateur detective and Mr. Theodore Burnett put on the line.

“This is Mrs. Leslie, Mr. Burnett, Josie O’Gorman’s friend. Please tell her the foreigners next door to us are getting ready to move and the woman is sunning a silver fox scarf and a sealskin jacket, both of them too good for anybody living in this house to use. I haven’t any good furs of my own but I can tell them a mile off.”

Mr. Theodore Burnett smiled and made a note of the fact that the amateur lady detective had no furs but knew good ones a mile off. This was the same lady of whose judgment in the matter of dry goods Major Simpson had spoken so highly, knowing from the first that Josie O’Gorman’s clothes were of material too good to have been bought from the salary of a novice at the notion counter.

“Clever lady!” he muttered in an aside “Must keep her in mind.” He thanked her profusely for the information and begged her to keep

a sharp lookout through the day. "The evidence you have gathered is invaluable, my dear lady," he assured her.

"The window is open and I can see a large packing box and a wardrobe trunk and this Kambourian woman is folding and packing as fast as she can. I gossiped with her a moment, quite casually, and she told me herself she was thinking of moving. You'd best tell Josie right off."

"You are right! Thank you, and good bye!"

Mr. Burnett had just hung up the receiver when Major Simpson came bustling into the office.

"Ah, Mr. Theodore, and how are you this nice sunny morning? Spring in the air, my boy, spring! I have come to see you concerning this O'Gorman person. Singular case — quite singular! She is actually working behind the notion counter this morning quite as though nothing had happened — not at all abashed — but meek withal, meek and I must say modest. She dropped her eyes when I passed and had occasion to stoop and hide her head. Modest, quite modest! I feel more inclined to deal gently with one who shows becoming modesty."

Mr. Burnett could not help a sly smile but he controlled himself and said rather sternly:

“Major Simpson, I ask you to let me do what dealing is necessary with Miss O’Gorman, in fact, I ask you most emphatically.”

This was as near as either of the Burnett brothers had ever come to commanding the old gentleman whom they had so unwillingly inherited from their predecessors, but Mr. Theodore Burnett had no intention of letting Major Simpson mix himself up in the matter of Josie O’Gorman and her methods any more than possible.

“Certainly!” said the elderly detective, stiffly. “I have never been one to overstep authority, but I feel it is my duty to warn you, young and untried, against the machinations of a type like this O’Gorman person.”

“All right, Major Simpson, I am warned — and now I shall go and interview the young lady.”

“Do not be too easy on her,” insisted the determined Major. “I am — ” But what he was Mr. Burnett did not wait to hear. He felt that Josie must be told immediately of the silver fox scarf and fur coat sunning in the rear window at Number 11 Meadow Street, and of the large packing box and wardrobe trunk and of Mrs. Leslie’s gossip. He was in the elevator and mak-

ing for the street floor of the store before the Major's sentence was completed.

All was as Major Simpson had reported. There was Josie O'Gorman conducting herself as though nothing had happened, selling tapes and pins with as much industry as she would have shown had her living depended upon it.

At the jewel novelty counter across the aisle Miss Fauntleroy moved with deliberate grace, totally unconscious of the fact that the sandy haired little person with the unimportant countenance, who seemed so busy making unimportant sales of bone buttons and shoe laces, never once let the haughty beauty get out of her line of vision.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GIRL IN THE RED TAM

There was an undercurrent of excitement at Burnett & Burnett's on that sunny Monday morning. Every clerk in the store had either read or heard of the article in the Sunday paper. There was much conjecture as to the identity of the beauty who had purloined the goods and then returned them to Mr. Burnett.

“It sounds like they were talking about me,” said Gertie Wheelan, patting her permanent wave complacently. “That is, all but me being a thief. Min knows I never took a bunch of lace off her counter because when she missed it I was standing right here by her.”

“Of course I know you didn't, Gertie,” laughed Min, “but the fact that you were standing near me when I missed it isn't very good evidence that you didn't take it. I reckon your character is about the best evidence that you didn't take it. You are a vain old goose, Gertie, but every-

body knows you are as honest as you are vain, and that is going some.”

Gertie did not know whether to be complimented or not, but since it was pleasanter to be flattered than to be censured she decided to be flattered.

“I’ve a great mind to ask old Simp who it was,” whispered Min.

“I already did that,” put in Jane Morton, “and he had the cheek to pretend he did not know what I was talking about. You see no names are mentioned in the paper. He hummed and hawed and stuck out his chest and patted his white waistcoat and said: ‘Really, my dear young lady, I cannot conjecture er—er’ and he swelled up a little more and went on: ‘Of course I cannot deny that I know what is going on in this establishment, but prudence compels me to dissemble er—er—to dissemble.’”

The girls all laughed at Jane’s droll mimicry.

“Have you had a chance to ask Josie O’Gorman what she thinks?” asked Min. “Josie is a mighty wise little girl and I betcher she has her own thinks on this subject just as she has on every other.”

“Yes, I asked her,” replied Jane, “and she

just laughed and said maybe she was the wicked beauty her own self. She said she might as well be because old Simpson had never taken his eye off her the whole morning. Sure enough, there the old fellow was, circling around the notion counter glaring all the time at Josie. I don't see how she stands it. I'd have to call him down and either make him quit his foolishness or offer some explanation. Josie went on making sales and paid no attention to him except once when he came close up to her she ducked under the counter so she could relax into a giggle."

The girls had met for a moment near the cashier's desk. Similar groups were forming and breaking through the entire building.

"Who do you think it is?" was asked again and again.

Now and then some know-all would make a positive assertion such as: "I know on good authority who it is but I am not at liberty to divulge the name."

"Look!" and Min nudged Jane Morton. "There's Mr. Theodore Burnett talking to Josie O'Gorman. Old Simpson has left the floor. I saw him going up on the elevator. I wonder what our junior member wants with Josie. Look! She

is evidently getting leave from the head of the department. Jiminy crickets! If she isn't leaving with the boss! "

Min was right. Josie was leaving the floor with Mr. Theodore. The information Mrs. Leslie had telephoned must be treated seriously and without delay. The police must be warned and Josie felt the time had come for a search warrant to be issued on the Kambourians. She accompanied Mr. Burnett to his office and soon had the police station on the line.

"Any report from the detectives watching 11, Meadow Street?" she asked.

"Nothing doing there!" was the answer from the man at the desk.

"Well, I have inside information that the woman is packing up, so you better get a search warrant ready and keep a close watch on the premises," she commanded. "Don't let the men leave their post for a moment."

"Hump!" grumbled the police sergeant, "anybody would think —" But what anybody would think was lost on Josie who hung up the receiver with a click.

"Asleep at the switch as usual!" she exclaimed. "But I must hurry back to my counter."

I wish that old Major Simpson would get busy and help me instead of circling around me with his eyes hanging out on his cheeks."

"Shall I make him stop?" asked Mr. Burnett.

"Oh no, perhaps he is safer watching me than he would be helping me. Anyhow that Jimmy Blaine is on the job all right. He has been popping in and out of the store all morning pretending to buy socks and ties and matching ribbons for his imaginary wife. He is a clever lad. I have a notion I'd better give up selling things for a while if you will supply a girl for my counter."

"Indeed, yes!" agreed Mr. Theodore.

When Josie did not return to her duties of selling notions the girls at the neighboring counters commented on it.

"Do you reckon she's been shipped?" wondered one.

"Hardly — she's too good at the business and as regular as clock work."

"It's funny she went off with the boss and has been gone an age and no sign of her. I do hope she isn't in any trouble. Look! There's a green girl at the button counter!"

"Whatcher reckon is the matter? That old

Simp is at the bottom of it I betcher. He's been bugging his eyes out at Josie for ever so long. Look, there he is back again. He looks worried over something." Thus spoke Min, but her flow of eloquence was cut short by a customer demanding to see some Irish lace.

"The best is none too good for me," asserted the customer sharply. She was a young woman with bobbed black hair very much becurled, a mouth so painted it gave one the impression that she had been eating poke berries, cheeks to match not only lips but a string of red, red beads twisted several times around her throat and hanging to her waist. In her hand she carried a bright red swagger stick. Her hat — a red tam — was worn far on one side. Brows and lashes were blackened to match the blue black hair.

"Sure!" said Min demurely. "The best is none too good but it may be too costly," she muttered under her breath.

"Never mind the cost — that is my affair. Ah, this is very sweet," she said, pulling out a bunch of the costly lace and spreading it out on the counter. "But show me other widths and patterns. Have you any point d'esprit?"

"No, we have no point d'esprit," said Min

with ill concealed impatience. Her lunch hour had struck and she felt it was hard lines to be forced to show this painted flapper expensive lace that she was sure she had no idea of buying.

“Some duchesse, too,” demanded the determined shopper. “Nothing better than that?”

Poor Min was forced to produce more and better lace. The counter was strewn with boxes of the priceless merchandise. Miss Fauntleroy was ready to go out for luncheon. She paused for a moment to speak to Min. All she said was:

“Is not the store clock slow?”

Min looked up from the lace she was showing the possible purchaser and compared her wrist watch with the large time piece hanging on the opposite wall.

“I guess not,” she said, and resumed her labors.

Miss Fauntleroy proceeded leisurely towards the front door. The much made-up young person who had been so intent on lace, without one word to Min, turned and followed the haughty beauty. The aisles were crowded with shoppers but the bobbed haired, red mouthed flapper kept close behind Miss Fauntleroy.

Outside in the sunshine the dark beggar with

a patch over one eye sat and in a wheedling tone besought the passers-by to buy his pencils.

“ Ver-r-y fine — ver-r-y sharp — ” he quavered. “ Buy — sweet lady — buy.” His one eye had appeal enough for two. Many persons dropped coins in his outstretched hat.

Miss Fauntleroy stopped in front of him.

“ Buy sweet lady — buy a pencil — ” She stooped to select one from the box of red, white and blue pencils he held on his knees. From that moment astonishing things began to happen, both within and without the department store of Burnett & Burnett’s.

Within a sudden hue and cry was raised by the distracted Min.

“ Catch her! Catch her quick! ” she cried to Major Simpson who was still walking curiously and cautiously around the notion counter, as though he expected Josie to bob up at any moment from behind the counter.

“ Catch what? Catch whom? ”

“ That girl with the bobbed black hair in a red tam and red beads! ” screamed Min. “ She’s ‘klept’ a whole bunch of lace — two bunches — maybe three — the finest in the shop. At least I reckon she did it. Go after her and get her.

Don't stand still. I can't go myself because I've got to keep an eye on all this stuff."

Major Simpson trotted obediently towards the front entrance. This was a new turn of affairs — a shoplifter and not the elusive Josie. He bumped into Mr. Theodore Burnett in the aisle.

"Another thief!" he spluttered. "Girl with bobbed black hair and red beads. Lace again — front entrance — better come with me!"

CHAPTER XVIII

JOSIE O'GORMAN'S VICTORY

Outside the store even more stirring things were being enacted. When Miss Fauntleroy leaned over with the seeming intention of selecting a pencil from the beggar's box there had been a quick exchange of glances between the proud beauty and the one eyed mendicant, an exchange of glances and also the passing of a parcel which was slid from the wide, bell shaped sleeve of the young woman into the open breast of the man's shabby coat. The movement was so rapid that no one who had not been on the lookout could possibly have seen it. But someone was on the lookout and that one was no other than the flapper of the bobbed black hair and the red, red mouth. She did a very remarkable thing for a flapper.

As quick as a flash she whipped out something from the pocket of her tweed suit, which, when one came to think of it, was of rather sober pattern for one so flapperish and not at all in keep-

ing with the red beads and startling tam. The article she drew from her pocket flashed in the sunlight for a moment and then — snap! snap! and a pair of handcuffs gleamed on the wrists of the one-eyed beggar before the astonished Miss Fauntleroy could straighten up from the selection of a pencil.

“Don’t let him get away!” came in commanding tones from the mysterious flapper. The remark was addressed to none other than Jimmy Blaine, who had been pretending to be a corner masher during such moments as he could spare from the business of shopping for a highly fictitious family.

“Trust me!” was his cheery rejoinder as he laid a heavy hand on the shoulder of the beggar who was now trembling like a leaf.

The girl with the bobbed black hair then caught Miss Fauntleroy by the wrist, at the same moment producing another pair of handcuffs from the capacious pockets of her tweed suit. She endeavored to snap them on the wrists of the struggling girl, but Miss Fauntleroy proved too strong, and jerking free, started to run. Swift as had been the action a crowd had gathered, as crowds will, and closing around the struggling

pair cut off all avenues of escape. The black haired girl must have known something about the game of football for she made a flying leap and caught the taller girl in an iron grip. They swayed together and fell.

In the scrimmage that ensued more startling things happened. Two hats came off, and with them two heads of hair. A red tam and a bobbed black wig were torn from the flapper, disclosing the closely coiled sandy hair and well shaped head of none other than Josie O'Gorman. The elaborate coiffure belonging to Miss Fauntleroy also came off with the stylish picture hat.

The combatants staggered to their feet. When Josie caught sight of her antagonist, standing hot, sullen and ashamed, so hemmed in by the crowd there was no escape, a wave of pity came over her. The proud and haughty Miss Fauntleroy was only a poor misguided boy. The marvelled wig with all its puffs and coils had turned a handsome lad into a beautiful young woman.

“Gee!” was all Josie could say. “And I thought you were your own sister all the time. I hate to put handcuffs on you — won't you come along without them?”

“Yes — I'm through. The game's up and I'm

glad of it. I'll go along with you all right."

Major Simpson, closely followed by Mr. Burnett, was trying to make his way through the crowd. He knew something was going on and his superior intelligence must be in demand. He also knew that lace had been stolen and that a person with black bobbed hair was the thief. It was irritating that it was not Josie O'Gorman who had been caught in the act, but then, any thief was better than no thief at all.

"Here, let me through! I am a detective."

The word detective was an open sesame for him. The crowd divided and he and Mr. Burnett passed through to the scene of the fray.

"Some scene it was!" Mr. Burnett described later on to his mother and sisters. "There was little Miss O'Gorman, her suit all dusty and dishevelled, her hat gone and her face made up in the most absurd manner with blackened brows and painted lips. She had by the hand a young boy dressed as a girl. Handsome? Handsome as Hermes! Shame and anger were both depicted on his countenance, and his head, with its dark, closely cropped curls, was hung in deep dejection. On the pavement wigs and hats were so much in evidence that one might have thought

there had been a battle royal and both fighters had been decapitated. I had no idea who the youth was at first, not recognizing 'Miss Fauntleroy' without her wig. Miss O'Gorman's famous string of red beads had broken and were scattered all over the pavement. It looked to me like a million beads, some of them as big as bantam eggs."

Major Simpson, acting true to form, broke into the ring blustering as usual.

"What's all this?" he demanded. Not recognizing Josie with her bizarre make-up or Miss Fauntleroy without her wig, the old gentleman stood gazing at the pavement. He suddenly remembered Min's words: "Black bobbed hair and red tam." He stooped and picked up Josie's wig and hat. It looked as though a tragedy had just been enacted at the front entrance of Burnett & Burnett's.

"Who has done this thing?" he asked solemnly, glaring all around.

"I reckon I did," laughed Josie.

"I'll say she did!" exclaimed Jimmy Blaine, who was still clinging to the handcuffed beggar.

At Josie's words Major Simpson looked at her more closely and through the paint recognized

the dangerous criminal, Miss Josie O'Gorman. Just then a policeman pushed his way through the crowd.

“Officer, arrest this woman,” commanded Major Simpson officiously, pointing an accusing finger at the grinning Josie. “I fancy, madam, you will find this no laughing matter when you are safely behind bars.”

“Yes, yes! She is the culprit!” cried the handcuffed beggar. “Good Mr. Officer, let me loose. I have done nothing but sit here trying in my poor-r way to make a living selling the pencils — and see, I am a good American, because I sell only the red, white and blue of our flag.”

“Do your duty, officer,” insisted Major Simpson. “Arrest this young woman. She is a shop-lifter and depraved beyond belief for one so er — er — young.”

“And beautiful,” smirked the irrepressible Josie. She then turned to the officer, all levity of manner falling from her. “I am detective Josie O'Gorman, Sergeant Fagan. I have just caught this boy red-handed. Open his father's coat and you will find a heap of costly lace which has been stolen from Burnett & Burnett within the last few minutes. I'll turn this youth over to you.

I am sure his case is one for the juvenile court to deal with. The father, who goes by the name of Kambourian and lives at 11 Meadow Street, is the one to arrest."

The lace was found just as Josie had said, three bunches of it hidden in the ragged coat of the patch eyed beggar. The patrol wagon was called and father and son were carried off, Kambourian loudly asserting his innocence in spite of the lace found in his manly bosom. He declared to the end that he had no idea how it had got there.

"I'll follow as soon as I can wash my face," Josie whispered to Sergeant Fagan. "Keep a close watch on the old bird. I believe the young one, poor fellow, is glad the thing has broken and I fancy you'll have no trouble with him."

Mr. Burnett had been a silent witness to the encounter between Josie and Major Simpson—silent and amused. He had promised Josie to let her manage the affair and he had done so, although he had been sorely tempted to step in and interfere when the self satisfied old gentleman had so peremptorily commanded the policeman to arrest the little detective. Now he wondered what stand Major Simpson would take and for

a moment felt sorry for the hereditary employee of the firm of Burnett & Burnett. He need not have wasted his sympathy, however, as that gentleman's self esteem was proof against any shock. He immediately took possession of the stolen lace as though he, and he alone, had been responsible for its recovery.

“ Ah, yes, I was sure we could track down the criminal. A little patience and eternal vigilance and lo, the thief is caught! ”

“ Exactly! ” said Josie, “ but not always the right thief.”

“ Patience, I say, patience and astuteness will unravel any mystery,” continued Major Simpson, ignoring Josie's remark. “ You will remember, Mr. Burnett, that I said from the beginning that Miss O'Gorman was not what she seemed. You will grant me that, eh? ” And thus did the old man talk on and on, seeming actually to feel that it was his cleverness that had caught the shoplifters.

The net had closed around the Kambourians — husband, wife and son. The search warrant revealed a great store of stolen articles, taken not only from Burnett & Burnett's but from almost every shop in Wakely; dainty, choice articles, just

the kind with which to stock a novelty shop, which had been Madame Kambourian's ambition.

"We had only just acqui-r-r-ed enough things," she wailed after she and her husband were sentenced to a term in the penitentiary. "And I would have been all moved and away if that bad, bad per-r-son had not warned the author-r-ities that I was planning to flit. Such a kind looking per-r-son too! But one nevair-r-e can tell who is false."

Be it said in favor of Kambourian, the man, that his deepest concern was for "poor Mamma" and his chief regret that she should not have escaped.

"If she had only told us that the young lady had bought the paper in which the articles of value were twisted we would have been more careful," he said to Jimmy Blaine, who interviewed him for the great soul stirring scoop. "She merely said the lace and things had been lost. We had no knowledge how and we did not question poor Mamma too closely because we are always so tender of her. She is so gay and we did so hate to make her sad. This beggar's life was hard on poor Mamma — to sit all day and whine for pennies when she loved so to live and be

happy. And clothes — ah *mon Dieu*, how poor Mamma does love to dress up — yes — yes — I, too, like the life. Ah me! All that is to be postponed — but perhaps — some day — ”

The boy, Roy, was taken before the juvenile court where the wise young judge listened to all Josie had to tell him of the unfortunate environment in which he had been raised. She told of the conversation she had overheard through the open window and of the boy's evident reluctance to proceed in the dishonest course mapped out for him by his parents.

“ Yes,” the boy told the judge, “ I have hated it always, but because I had the knack of mimicry and could pass myself off for a girl I was forced to wear those fool clothes and pretend I was ‘ Miss Fauntleroy.’ I despised myself all the time, despised myself and began to despise them, I mean my mother and father, although they did love me and were always kind to me except that they made a thief of me. Of course if I was going to be a thief I determined to be the very cleverest thief in the business, and if it had not been for you, Miss O’Gorman, I believe I could have been. Anyhow I am glad it is all over and I’m going to be as straight now as I used to be

crooked. All I want is a chance. Gee, I'm glad to be able to wear pants all the time! I never have been a sissy, and many is the time I felt like jumping in the river when I had to wear those silly skirts and picture hats. It was poor Mamma's fault. Not that I blame her, for she did so want to have a nice little shop of her own and dress up in pretty things. She always said when once we got together enough things we would go into a real business and stop stealing. Poor Mamma! I wish I could do something for her."

Josie thought that a prison term might do more for poor Mamma than anything else. At least it might teach her that honesty was the best policy for her to pursue in the future.

A chance was given Roy. The judge of the juvenile court sent him to an industrial school where it would be possible for him to work out his own salvation. He was as a brand snatched from the burning and, by God's grace, snatched in time. Josie was sorry for the youth and Mary Leslie wept many tears in her pity.

"He was so handsome," she sobbed.

"He still is," consoled Josie, "and now it can be 'Handsome is as handsome does,' as my father used to say. This thing broke just in time

to save that poor boy from becoming a confirmed criminal. As it is, I bet anything he'll pull through and come out of that school a good fellow and a useful citizen. He is interested in the stage and I hope he'll do something big in the dramatic line some day. The way he acted *Miss Fauntleroy* was little short of genius."

"Perhaps he'll come out all right," said Mrs. Leslie, "but I have my doubts about foreigners. Anyhow I am glad we took you to board, Josie, because it has made life much more interesting. Just to think of Mr. Burnett's writing me a letter of thanks for the part I took in helping to catch that woman! Of course I appreciate the handsome check he sent me and the fur jacket he sent Mary, but I think more of the letter than I do of the check and the jacket. After all, the detective tales I have read did something for me, if only to make me keep my eyes open for mix-ups."

Major Simpson decided after due consideration to accept Burnett & Burnett's offer of a pension and he determined to retire from the active labors of a detective.

"Of course this is a good time to retire, while I am yet in the hey-dey of my powers," he was

heard to say to Miss Willie at Maison Blanche. Mrs. Trescott was the person who heard him say it and it was with difficulty that she controlled her merriment. "I have just been the means of tracking down for my firm a family of desperate criminals and — er — er — out of gratitude to me the Burnett Brothers have offered to pension me on — er — er — full pay."

"How wonderful!" trilled Miss Willie. "But you will remain in Wakely, surely?"

"Ah, yes! In fact I should not like to go far from Burnett & Burnett's because they may need my advice at any moment. My advice — er — er — is most important."

Josie had made many friends at Burnett & Burnett's, and they were one and all very sorry that she was leaving the notion counter and Wakely.

"We felt all the time that you were a little different," Jane Morton told her. "Min and I used to talk about it, but we just thought you had picked up more education than we had and that was what made you different. If we had ever known that you were a detective we might have been a little shy. But we have learned that a woman detective may also be a human being."

As for that 'Miss Fauntleroy,' my blood boils when I think of her — him. Anyhow we never did have much to do with him because we always mistrusted her — er — him. She never did seem natural and now since she has turned out to be a boy, I see the reason. One thing to his credit, he was a gentleman, even when masquerading as a girl, and never tried to get chummy with us. I feel a little sorry for him and hope he will turn out all right."

That night Josie accepted Mr. Theodore Burnett's insistent invitation to take dinner at his home. There was no longer any good reason for refusal, though in truth she sought no such reason.

Never was there a gayer, livelier party. Mr. Burnett's sisters, May and Lily, vied with one another in little acts of gracious hospitality, and the aged mother, austere garbed in a voluminous black dress, gave the lie to her years and her garb as fires kindled in her deep set eyes at the retelling of the capture of the shoplifters. Mr. Theodore was high in his praise and colorful in his narration.

Josie, vivacious enough in other matters, had little to say concerning her latest exploit, having

learned from her father that modesty and justifiable pride are becoming handmaidens.

“Now, Miss O'Gorman,” said Mr. Theodore when the dinner was over, “let us come back to a matter of business. You know how we appreciate your efforts and how valuable your services have been to our firm. However, it is hardly to be hoped that this will definitely stop all shoplifting. When the story has cooled, the whole wretched business will flare up again. Through diplomacy we have succeeded in influencing Major Simpson to retire on full pay. No doubt he deserves it, for as my brother Charles points out, loyalty deserves reward, and the Major was certainly loyal. Now we are in need of a house detective and we are willing to substantially increase the pay where results are as certain as mere loyalty. A-hem, the — the place is yours, Miss O'Gorman, if you will take it.”

Before the astonished Josie could form a reply the aged mother broke in:

“I hope you will accept, and I want you to come here to live. This is a big house, plenty of room, and you will add a great deal of life to our colorless world. I have reared four children who have been successful in a matter-of-fact way.

I feel that I would like to mother you — you with your startling ingenuity. Won't you come? ”

“ You simply *must!* ” chorused Lily and May. “ Please do. Just think of the things we could think up to do,” and they clapped their hands in anticipation.

Josie was troubled. She appreciated the kindness; sensed its deep sincerity. But she knew her own spirit — knew that dull routine could not long hold her interest.

“ I am sorry,” she began simply, “ but I must get back to Dorfield and my work. The Higgedy Piggledy Shop needs me, and somehow I seem to need it. Then, too, Captain Lonsdale writes me that there is work to do right away — a peculiar case that he thinks I can handle. I—I simply can't tell you how I feel, but surely you will understand.”

“ I do,” nodded the mother. “ You are too big a girl for a little place. We will miss you, but I am glad that you are ambitious.”

“ It isn't ambition,” answered Josie, and a big tear stood in her eye. “ It is a sort of trust, the carrying on of my father's work.”

“ Well, well,” boomed Mr. Theodore, vigor-

ously blowing his nose, "you must not forget us. Some day you may feel like accepting the offer. It is an open one and may bring you back to Wakely."

"Poof!" protested Lily. "As if she must wait for *that* to bring her back. She is going to visit us at least once every year and give us a complete account of herself—won't you, Josie?"

"I'd love to," Josie answered quietly.

She little realized what the coming year would bring and how thrilling would be that first account. Some hint of it came to her a few days later when she reached Dorfield and called on Captain Lonsdale. The task put before her called for the best that was in her; an undertaking worthy of the efforts of her illustrious father.

Sobered by the importance of the coming quest, she seemed to have lost some of her spontaneity when her friends, Irene and Mary Louise, rapturously greeted her return to the Higgledy Piggedy Shop.

"My dear," said Mary Louise a little later when the first warm gush of welcome was over, "you have changed. You seem so quiet and—

and sort of sweetly pensive. I declare, Irene, I believe she is in love."

"I am," said Josie, comically wriggling her nose in her old manner, "with my work."

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